University of Alberta

# Fostering Parent-Teacher Relationships When Children are Gifted

by

Sharon Charlotte Penney

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

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Date August 19, 1997

## Dedication

*I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, Arch and Viola Jesso, and to my parents-in-law, George and Myrtle Penney, whose never-ending support made my education possible.*

## Abstract

The intention of this qualitative study was to explore parent and teacher relationships when children are identified as gifted. This research study addressed two interrelated questions:

1. What is the parent's perspective of the relationship between the parent and the teacher when a child is gifted?
2. What is the teacher's perspective of the relationship between the teacher and the parent when a child is gifted?

Five parent and four teacher co-researchers engaged in two stages of the research; during the first stage, the co-researchers participated in open-ended, audiotaped interviews. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. In the second stage, the analysis was returned to the co-researchers for elaboration and validation. One parent and one teacher co-researcher engaged in a third interview; during this stage the present researcher validated the combined theme structures developed for each group.

The results of this study indicated five parent themes, including: (1) programming, (2) teacher competencies, (3) curriculum needs, (4) parental involvement in their children's education, and (5) problematic behavior. There were also five themes that emerged from the teacher data. They included: (1) process of identification,

(2) funding issues, (3) issues in communication, (4) partnerships in education, and (5) impact on the children.

Finally the results of the parents and teachers themes were compared, and four overlapping themes were found. They were: (1) funding, (2) meeting the needs, (3) communication, and (4) impact on the child. These themes were then discussed in relation to the existing literature, implications for professionals, implications for parents, and suggested topics for further research.

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## Chapter 1

## Introduction

The current study grew out of the researcher's interest in investigating the experiences of parenting children identified as gifted. From a preliminary interview completed in 1994, themes emerged that indicated that school-based issues were central to the concerns of the parent interviewed.

A review of the available literature found that school-based issues were also identified as concerns by other researchers interested in families of children identified as gifted (Hackney, 1981; Keirouz, 1990). A pilot study was then completed by the present researcher, interviewing one parent and one teacher. This study confirmed the researcher's belief that parents and teachers of children identified as gifted had school basedissues and concerns that required further exploration (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995).

Keirouz (1990) stated that parents, once their children are identified as gifted, may become overly critical of the teacher, even those teachers who are considered competent. She further commented that parents do not understand the functioning of the school and that school personnel often do not understand the functioning of families of children identified as gifted.

Hackney (1981) noted that both families and schools are complex institutions and that conflict can occur when children are identified as gifted, even when programs are carefully planned. He stated that, "Parents feel isolated from one another and from the school. They do not have access to those important 'checks' and often doubt their roles" (p. 54).

Parents of children identified as gifted struggle to meet the needs of their children in the school system; they face society's attitudes that gifted children will "make it on their own," and that providing services to gifted children is "elitist" (Clark, 1996; Gross, 1994). The attitudes of society can have a direct impact on the political climate and affect funding decisions regarding programming for children identified as gifted. When parents are faced with attitudes such as "suspicion," and "outright hostility" (Clark, 1997, p. 165), they may withdraw and not advocate for their children, thereby leaving their children in school situations that are not conducive to learning, and where the likelihood exists that the children will not achieve their potential (Clark, 1997).

Parents of children identified as gifted also have to deal with attitudes of school personnel. Clark (1997) stated that the attitude towards gifted children by school personnel "is not positive" (p. 166). She further stated that the "attitudes of teachers towards the gifted not only affect the students and their performance, but also the acceptance and effectiveness of the gifted program, and the morale of the school as a whole" (p. 167). Therefore, children identified as gifted face attitudes from a significant "system" that may impact negatively on their schooling.

Friedman and Gallagher (1991) stated that building effective relationships between parents and teachers of children identified as gifted has to be based on an "understanding of the phenomenon of exceptional ability within social and familial contexts" (p. 257). Once children are identified as gifted they are considered outside the "norm" and therefore create additional pressure on both the family and the school in an attempt to meet their needs. Unfortunately, the

parents and the teachers can often end up in adversarial relationships because of the lack of understanding between the two groups.

Minuchin (1974), a distinguished family therapist, found that dysfunctional systems are identified by their rigidity and resistance to change. The resistance to change can occur in any system, including families and schools. When members of a system perceive that they are threatened they are more likely to become rigid in their functioning, as is often seen when parents and teachers enter into adversarial relationships.

Friedman and Gallagher (1991) further pointed out two specific beliefs that impact negatively on parents and teachers working together.

> First, when school personnel discount parental abilities, they are far less likely to involve parents actively in developing and implementing educational plans for bright children. Second, a sense of threat that (untrained) parents might be more effective in working with a bright child than the professional can lead to territoriality and defensiveness, driving a wedge between parents and staff. (p. 261)

A further rationale for studying parent-teacher relationships when children are identified as gifted comes from the current policies established by government and School Boards, to increase parental involvement in education within the general population. Alberta Education (1994) released a position paper entitled Roles and Responsibilities in Education, which discussed the future roles of the various groups involved in the education of children, including teachers, parents, and community. This position paper stated, as its

key premise, that "Parents have a right and a responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children. As well, parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children are ready to learn, and to help them make good academic progress" (p. 16).

The document also reflected public input; the public wanted to have "a meaningful role" and defined such roles as follows:

(1) Having access to "vehicles" [mechanism] for taking action.

(2) Having a guarantee that when advice is given, someone will respond seriously.

(3) Having timely access to the information they [parents] require. (p. 16)

To establish such "meaningful roles" there first needs to be an understanding of relationships. Teachers will need to adjust to the changing philosophy and develop skills that include greater parent involvement in the schooling of children.

The position paper also targeted teachers. The key premise for teachers indicated that, "The role of the teacher is to enable students to achieve the learning expectations outlined in the provincial Program of Studies by providing instruction and fostering learning" (p. 29). The document also stated that the responsibility for education is a shared one among parents, students, and teachers.

The issue of parent and teacher relationships is also current on an international level. The United States Congress introduced The Goals 2000: Educate America Act (March 1994), setting new standards for students, families, and schools. One of the goals of this act was increased parental participation in schools (Moles, 1996).

There is a paucity of literature specifically investigating the relationship between parents and teachers when children are

identified as gifted. It is hoped that the present study will provide information that may help parents and teachers, of children identified as gifted, to understand each other's position. It is also hoped that the present study will provide information that can facilitate parent and teacher relationships that benefit the children who are central to their concern.

The research that does exist has indicated that parents and teachers working together can have a beneficial effect on children. The research also has indicated that teachers have a great impact on parental participation in the schools (Epstein, 1996). The current trend in education is to have greater parental involvement; however, sharing the role of educator with parents has been viewed as intimidating by some teachers. Therefore, the need for exploring parent-teacher relationships is clear, considering the current trend in education.

Research Questions

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the experiences of parents and teachers as they interact with one another for the common goal of educating, and meeting the needs of children identified as gifted. It is important to study parents' and teachers' viewpoints in an attempt to gain an understanding of the relationship that exists and to provide insight on improvements they would like to see in their relationships.

This research addressed two interrelated questions:

1. What is the parent's perspective of the relationship between the parent and the teacher when a child is gifted?
2. What is the teacher's perspective of the relationship between the teacher and the parent when a child is gifted?

These questions were explored in an open-ended interview format with five parents and four teachers. The research was exploratory and sought to provide descriptions of the experiences of teachers and parents of children identified as gifted. The researcher used qualitative methodologies which have been documented as an effective approach in exploratory research (Patton, 1990).

In summary, research designed to identify and describe issues and concerns of parents and teachers is justified in that it may serve to identify parameters to promote a positive and productive relationship between the groups. While there is a plethora of information on parent and teacher relationships, there currently exists relatively little empirical research on the relationships between parents and teachers when children are gifted.

Definition of Terms

Giftedness. In this study, giftedness is indicated by children who demonstrate high levels of achievement, high general intellectual ability, academic aptitude, and creative and productive thinking. While definitions of giftedness found in the literature also include leadership, and visual and performing arts (Feldhusen, 1991), all of the children of the parents interviewed for this study were considered "academically gifted," indicating advanced ability in one or more areas related to school-based abilities.

Co-researcher. Participants in this study are referred to as co-researchers. The term co-researchers is used to emphasize the cooperative and voluntary nature of the research process in qualitative research (Osborne, 1990). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, co-researchers are only those individuals that provide the

researcher with in-depth descriptions of their experiences on the specific topic addressed in this study.

Identification. The two school boards involved in this study used different procedures for identification of children as gifted. For the children whose parents participated in this study one school board has used an achievement measure (The Canadian Test of Basic Skills) to identify the child as gifted. However, the parent of this child also used a privately arranged cognitive assessment to confirm her child's giftedness. The parent stated that an IQ of 130 was required for the child to be funded as gifted by her School Board.

The second school board used a "matrix system" to identify the children in this study as gifted. This included teacher and parent recommendations, the results of standardized ability testing such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Third Edition, or Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test; and achievement testing such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills. Also, teacher and parent are asked to rate the student's creativity, motivation and learning characteristics, on an informal rating scale devised by the School Board. Only one to two percent of district students are identified formally within this School Board as gifted. (Teacher Co-researcher, Personal Communication, April 5, 1997)

Parent and teacher relationships can have many meanings; therefore, in this study, "relationship" will mean how the parents and teachers work together for the common goal of educating the child, how these two groups communicate with one another, as well as the process by which they arrive at decisions concerning the child. The reviewed literature also uses other terms such as "collaboration" and

"partnership" to describe or discuss relationships; these terms, will be used only as they apply to specific authors reviewed.

The term "relationships" is also referred to in the literature to mean a variety of things such as the parent and teacher relationships, family and school relationships, including all levels of school staffing from the support staff to the principal. The focus can be either very narrow or broad. The terms "home and school relationships" will be used in this research study, however other terms, such as "partnerships" and "collaboration" will be used only when used by specific authors or researchers.

Regular classroom in this study refers to a classroom in which the children are in age-appropriate placement with age-appropriate peers. However, the children in these classrooms may be heterogeneous in terms of ability levels.

Acceleration is discussed in a variety of forms in the literature. There are two types of acceleration discussed in this study: grade acceleration and curriculum acceleration. Grade acceleration in this study refers to a method of programming in which children are permitted to move from one grade into another, skipping the intermediate grade. This can occur in two ways: the child is simply allowed to move, usually based on assessment of the child's skills; or the child receives curriculum compacting, in which the child is permitted to complete the curriculum of two grades in one school year. Curriculum acceleration is the second type of acceleration discussed in this study. This type of acceleration occurs when children remain with their age peers but are permitted to move through the curriculum of specific subject areas. Sometimes children are permitted to move through the curriculum at their own pace;

sometimes they are permitted to complete only the next grade level in a specific subject.

Academic Challenge is a program option available in some schools in Alberta. This program type usually involves grouping children with high ability together in a separate classroom. These classrooms may contain a single grade (same-age peers), or they may be multi-graded (mixed age and grade). Generally, the child remains in his/her age-appropriate grade placement.

Overview of the Dissertation

This chapter has presented a brief introduction to the topic studied, as well as the rationale, the research questions, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 reviews the definitions of giftedness, identification of giftedness, parent-teacher relationships generally and when children are identified as gifted, as well as research on families when children are identified as gifted. Chapter 3 describes the methodologies used to gather and analyze the data, as well as the limitations of the study. Chapter 4 reviews the results of the parent interviews, and Chapter 5 reviews the results of the teacher interviews. Finally, Chapter 6 outlines the overlap between parent and teacher viewpoints, and discusses the results as compared with the relevant current literature.

## Chapter 2

## Review of the Related Literature

This review covers the literature specifically on parent and family issues; teacher issues; and parent and teacher relationships. There is a plethora of information available on gifted education, gifted programming, identification procedures and definitions of giftedness. For the purposes of this study, the present researcher has focused the literature review on topics specifically related to the research study. Additionally literature, related to the findings of the study, i.e., the themes reported in Chapters 4 and Chapter 5, will be discussed in Chapter 6.

### Research on Families

There is a great deal of research and information on families of gifted children. Topics such as the effect on families (both positive and negative) when a child has been identified and labelled as gifted, the effects of gifted children on parental relationships, parent/child relationships and sibling relationships, are found in the literature.

Positive family adjustment. In reviewing the literature on families of gifted children, the researcher found a mixture of positive and negative outcomes of having a gifted child in the family. Mathews, West, and Hosie (1986) found that the families of gifted children were better adjusted overall compared to the general population. Families completed the Family Assessment Device and their profiles were compared to the general population. The families of gifted children performed better on six of the seven scales, and the same as the general population on one scale. The areas that were shown as significantly better, were: (a) problem solving, (b)

communication, (c) rules, (d) affective responsiveness, (e) behavioral control, and (f) general functioning. The area in which there was no significant difference in functioning was affective involvement. Ross (1985) also found, in a study of Canadian families, that they were relatively well adjusted, and the results did not support the problems and issues reported in the American literature. These studies would suggest to that, overall, families with children who are gifted are healthy, well-adjusted families, who have no special needs.

Also, in the studies reviewed by Keirouz (1990), many families exhibited stable spousal relationships. The relationships were found to be at least as good or better than the national average. Cornell (1984) found that the parents who perceived their children as gifted were proud of their children, but more often this pride was connected to nonacademic areas, than to their abilities or achievement in academic areas. However, some studies suggest that there is a negative impact on the marital relationship when there is a discrepancy between how each spouse views their gifted child (Meckstroth, 1992).

Dysfunctional family patterns. Other researchers claim that gifted children can cause many difficulties within the family. Hackney (1981) studied parents of children who attended a summer program for gifted children. Hackney found that the families were stressed by the presence of a gifted child. His research yielded five themes identifying areas in which the families had difficulties. Keirouz (1990) found many family difficulties, including those found by Hackney (1981): (a) altered family roles and adaptations, (b) altered self-image, (c) negative impact on the martial relationship, (d) difficulty with clarifying roles in the family, (e) sibling relational

difficulties, (f) parental self-concept difficulties, (g) difficulties with school and school placement, and (h) uneven development.

Some parents of gifted children react to the knowledge that their children are gifted in a similar way to parents whose children have been diagnosed as being learning disabled (Friedman & Gallagher, 1991). Ross (1964) suggested that parents who are told their children are gifted often react to or grieve the loss of their "normal" child. While many view such a diagnosis as positive, some families really do not know how to cope or deal with a child they perceive as different. This places stress on the parents and they question their ability to parent such a child. Many parents feel an overpowering sense of responsibility and of having to do right by their child. Bridges (1973) suggested that many parents have feelings of inadequacy with respect to their ability to parent the child. This may result in the parents coming to resent or reject the exceptional child (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983).

In reviewing the literature, there is an indication that certain factors may influence the family's ability to cope with a gifted child, including: the discrepancy between his/her intellectual ability and his/her social emotional development (uneven development) (Keirouz, 1990); the difference between intellects of the gifted child and the family may determine the degree of the problem (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983); parental agreement or disagreement with the gifted label (Cornell, 1984); and how invested the parents are in the gifted label (Cornell & Grossberg, 1989).

Effects of labelling on family adjustment. Cornell (1984) studied 42 families which he divided into three groups: families with two gifted children; families with one gifted child and one non-gifted

child, and a control group with two non-gifted children. Cornell found that, in a number of situations, parents did not always agree with the "gifted" label given to the child. In with such disagreement, Cornell noted that, in the majority of cases, the mother agreed with the label and the father did not. Cornell also stated that mothers and fathers in his study had a different concept of the meaning of giftedness, the father's definition having more stringent criteria. Some of the parents studied had difficulty reconciling their differences of opinion, and the author found that often changes in the family boundaries occurred. For example, Cornell found that some of the families had shifting mother/child alliances that excluded the father. He also found that, in families where there was a single gifted child, the child has relatively more power, usually at the expense of the father.

In her study of underachieving gifted children, Rimm (1984), found similar patterns of behavior. In many instances she found that there was an escalating pattern of behavior that occurred in some families, where one parent became the "rescuer" and one parent became "authoritarian" in his/her approach to the child. The rescuer became over-involved with the child and there was a boundary shift with the rescuer/child forming a dyad. In the family-systems literature this over-involvement would be considered "enmeshment" (Minuchin, 1974). From a family system perspective, all families have rules (overt and covert), boundaries, and hierarchies that determine the emotional climate of the family (Cornell, 1884; Hackney, 1981; Minuchin, 1974).

Gifted children who display behaviors that are out of "sync" with expected behaviors for their age, or children whose

development is uneven, may force the family to adapt to accommodate those children. The literature has suggested that parents sometimes "adultize" gifted children. There can be boundary shifts where children take on more authority in the family, becoming part of the parental subsystem. Sometimes the parents lose control of the child and the child takes over the whole or part of the parental subsystem. These dysfunctional patterns put the family "at risk" for continued dysfunctional patterns of behavior because often the gifted child is not able to handle the power and freedom (Rimm & Lowe, 1988).

Cornell and Grossberg (1989) found that parents who perceived their child as gifted had a closer parent/child relationship and more feelings of pride for their child than did those parents who did not perceive their children as gifted. These authors studied the use of the term "gifted" by parents who had children enrolled in a gifted program; and compared it to the child's level of personal adjustment, as measured by a self-esteem inventory and personality scales. While all of the parents acknowledged using the term "gifted," approximately one quarter of the parents reported not using the term when referring to their child. The children of the parents who did not use the term "gifted" showed better adjustment than their equally able peers whose parents used the term. This was a correlational study with limitations; however, it might suggest another piece of the puzzle with respect to family adjustment when a child has been labelled as gifted.

Effects on siblings. Siblings of gifted children are faced with many difficulties. The research completed by Cornell and Grossberg (1986) suggested that non-gifted siblings of gifted children tended to

be consistently less well adjusted, prone to more personality adjustment problems and have lower self-esteem and higher anxiety. As well, non-gifted siblings were often unfairly compared to gifted siblings. Keirouz (1990) found that parents tended to view the non-gifted child as less competent than his/her actual performance suggested.

Frey and Wendroff (1983), in a study of families of gifted children, investigated three groups: healthy families (well adjusted), non-clinical families (families felt to have some problems with adjustment but not significant enough to be considered clinical), and clinically referred (families assessed to have significant problems), and found differences in sibling relationships among the groups. They found, in both healthy families and non-clinical problem families of gifted children, that the sibling subsystem showed little competition for the parents' attention and approval, no jealousy was evident, and there appeared to be evidence that there was camaraderie among the siblings. However, they found, in the clinical families, that the siblings did not display camaraderie. They were polite without warmth or openness, they placed more value on outside relationships, and there was some overt hostility among the siblings.

There is also literature suggesting that birth order has an effect on adjustment. Colangelo (1988) suggested that, when the oldest child is gifted, the younger child has difficulty living up to the standards set by the older gifted child, and when the younger child is gifted, Colangelo suggested that the older sibling may experience psychological embarrassment. Often the non-gifted sibling has to compete for attention as the gifted child becomes the idealized child,

and the recipient of intense attention and admiration. The gifted child organizes and focuses the family lifestyle and shapes the meaning of the family (Cornell, 1981). Colangelo and Brower (1987b) studied siblings of gifted children five years after initial identification, and found that the siblings did not suffer any long term effects with respect to their personal and emotional adjustment. This may indicate that once siblings adjust to the label they are able to adapt and find their place within the family unit.

Seeking assistance or counselling. Parents of gifted children may feel alone and unable to talk about their children with others. People react to children who are different, and more so when children are gifted (Clarke, 1997). There may be a degree of envy that certain skills are easier for these children (Friedman & Gallagher, 1991). Colangelo (1988) stated that society may have a misperception that the gifted child may get something for nothing. Parents also hesitate to seek professional help because they feel that, in comparison to parents with children who have disabilities, they have nothing to complain about. This may place the children identified as gifted, who live in dysfunctional families, at higher risk for the dysfunctional patterns to continue and impact on their lives (Friedman & Gallagher, 1991).

In summary, the literature on the role changes that are required when a child has been identified as gifted provides us with evidence of both negative and positive outcomes. The literature suggests that many families adapt and function extremely well, possibly better than the normal population. However, one can not ignore the fact that many families do experience difficulties, and that having a child who is outside the "normal" range of functioning may

place the family "at risk" for dysfunctional patterns of family interaction. There are no studies looking at this issue and, given the individuality and the variation in this population, these features would likely be very difficult to parcel out.

Teacher Issues

Teacher issues are also important when looking at parent and teacher relationships. It is essential that parents gain an understanding of the concerns of teachers; this may lead to reduction of misperceptions that can occur when there is a lack of understanding of the teacher's position.

Daniel (1991) focused on the question, "What does it mean to be a teacher?" The teachers interviewed for her study indicated a love of teaching and an affinity towards children. The teachers discussed their sensitivity towards children and their families and the hope that they could make a difference in the lives of children. The teachers demonstrated an interest in children, not only in academic skills, but also in terms of children as persons, and in learning skills to be successful in life.

Changing culture of teaching. One of the current issues for teachers focuses on the changes that are occurring within schools and may have an impact on parent and teacher relationships. In the stories of the teachers interviewed by Daniel (1991), there were suggestions about the changing culture of teaching. The teachers discussed stresses involved in teaching: wanting to do the absolute best for the children they teach, but not always being able to accomplish this goal due to the varying demands of teaching. The demands centered around providing children with the best

education, and ensuring that they meet the curriculum expectations set out by Alberta Education.

Janzen (1994), in an qualitative research study of teachers involved in integration of children with special needs, explored the issues and concerns of teachers, and the process of integration. Janzen identified the changing expectations of teachers and stated that, "With recent cutbacks to schools teachers are facing increased class sizes with fewer and fewer supports available to them. Teachers are concerned about meeting the demands placed on them within the regular classroom" (p. 1).

Gareau and Sawatzky (1995), in a study of home and school collaboration, found that a theme emerged entitled, "changes in society" (p. 468). This theme suggested changes in the roles of parents and schools, changes in political climate and budgetary restrictions, and the expectation that parents need to play a greater role in education of children. This study also suggested that parents are more knowledgeable and less willing to accept the school's authority over educational decisions.

Funding reduction and its impact on teachers. Another teacher issue that directly impacts on teachers and can have an effect on the school culture and the staff morale is funding. Recently the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA), reported that funding for education has been reduced by 8.5% between the 1985/86 and the 1996/1997 school years. This is a significant decrease in funding to education, and the ATA stated that the cuts to education are hurting teachers and decreasing the quality of education for all of Alberta's children (ATA News, 1997).

Funding cuts directly impact on the amount of support a teacher may have in the classroom, the amount of time a teacher has for preparation, and material resources that the teacher has for use within the classroom. Hawkins and Klas (1995) studied helping professionals including teachers, nurses, and social workers to determine the stressors that presented difficulty for these groups. The authors found that teachers rated time management as the most significant stressor. Teachers believed that the demand of course work and insufficient time for preparation were of particular concern. Also, teachers identified a lack of time to complete in-class work, and less time with their students, as significant concerns. These researchers also outlined other areas identified as stressors for the helping professionals.

Teachers' concerns regarding parents. Hawkins and Klas (1995) identified the second highest stressor for teachers as parent-teacher relationships. In a qualitative study of Alberta teachers who were forced to resign, Phillips (1995) found that three of the four teachers were identified through parent complaints to the principal or superintendent. The study focused on the supervisory process, however, it is of interest because the author stated: "Three of the four evaluations of these teachers were poorly done, as there seemed to be evidence of hurried supervision and biased decision making" (p. 3). Therefore, it is important to note that teachers may feel unsupported by the administration and by the school boards with which they are employed. With the increased level of parental involvement advocated by Alberta Education, teachers need to feel supported by adminstration and school boards. Teacher awareness

of inappropriate supervision and evaluation procedures serves to increase teacher stress around increased parental involvement.

Janzen (1994), in her study of teachers, found that a theme emerged with respect to "parental concerns" (p. 69). One of the issues discussed in the theme was the importance of communication between the teachers (co-researchers) and parents. This emerged for both parents of children with disabilities and for parents of children without disabilities.

In a study of learning activities at home, Epstein and Becker (1982) identified three reactions of teachers towards parental involvement. They concluded:

> (1) Parents care but cannot do much to help the school or their children in actual learning;
>
> (2) Parents care but should not help with school learning;
>
> (3) Parents care and can be of great help if they are shown how to help (p. 111).

The results of Epstein and Becker's (1982) study indicated that two factors determined the success of parental involvement, first, teacher commitment, and second, parent commitment. These authors suggested that the school climate, including other teachers and administrators, affects the success or failure of parental involvement in school-based activities.

Epstein (1986) stated that teacher practices were the most significant factor in the involvement of parents in the education of their children. "What we found is teachers' practices, not the education, marital status, or work place of parents, that made a difference in whether parents are productive partners with schools in their children's education" (p. 58). However, to ensure success,

Epstein stated, "Budgetary support for training teachers and parents must be available" (p. 58-59).

Epstein (1986) stated that many teachers believed that their professional status was in jeopardy when parents were involved in activities traditionally deemed as teacher territory. Epstein indicated that teachers could do more to involve parents. In a survey of teachers, Epstein stated that 58% made little or no contact with parents. Janzen (1994), in her study of Alberta teachers, also found that teachers were protective of their professional responsibilities. Regarding her theme "individual educational plans," she stated, "Two of the co-researchers had parents that wanted to write the IEP. Both these co-researchers were adamant that as teachers they were responsible for writing the IEP" (p. 50).

In a study on barriers to home school relationships, Leitch and Tangri (1988) stated that teachers viewed parents and their attitudes towards school as the most significant barrier to parent-teacher collaboration. The authors concluded that a lack of knowledge and lack of planning about how parents and teachers can work with each other effectively, are major barriers to collaboration.

Teacher attitudes towards gifted education. Dettmer (1985), in a study of teachers' attitudes towards gifted children, found that school personnel, generally, did not have a favorable attitude toward the gifted. However, teachers of the gifted were more likely to hold a more positive attitude. Dettmer surveyed teachers, principals, and psychologists, and found a lack of understanding of the needs of gifted children as a key area of concern. For example, one of the items that the groups were asked to respond to was: "Gifted children are influenced greatly by the emotional climate in the home and the

school room" (p. 256). While teachers of the gifted, school principals, and psychologists, generally agreed with this statement, the regular classroom teachers showed the lowest overall agreement with the statement. The study indicated that the different groups were not always in agreement and that they may not have enough knowledge of the literature and the needs of the gifted students. The author identified two areas of concern, first that often there is inappropriate program planning for children identified as gifted and second, the resources allocated to the gifted are often mishandled.

In summary, teachers have many issues and concerns that may directly impact on their ability to serve the children in their classrooms. The literature reviewed has suggested a changing culture of teaching whereby parents are being asked to take on a greater responsibility in education. The literature also suggests that it is necessary to provide appropriate training and education of both teachers and parents to be successful partners in the education of children. There is also difficulty suggested in the literature with the attitudes of some teachers towards children identified as gifted. Other concerns raised about education in general and education for children with special needs include decreased funding, decreased support, and increased class size. These concerns place a great amount of stress on teachers and make their teaching an ever increasing challenge.

Parent and Teacher Relationships

The area of research investigating parent and teacher relationships is currently an important one in Canada and the United States. Alberta Education is attempting to move toward increasing parent and community input into the education of the province's

children. The published research is clear that there appear to be significant benefits to children when parents are involved in their schooling (Epstein, 1996). Chavkin and Williams (1988) commented that, when parents are involved in their children's schooling, along with increased learning, there are other advantages that include: "A rise in student achievement scores; an increase in student attendance; a reduction in student dropouts; an improvement in student motivation, self-esteem and behavior, and more parent and community support" (p. 87).

Greenwood and Hickman (1991) also stated the above advantages, as well as increased student readiness to complete homework assignments, increased time with parents, higher education aspirations and greater parent satisfaction with teachers. Berger (1991) stated that an alliance between parent and teacher is needed to achieve optimal success. "Strong parent-teacher collaboration will be needed to ensure continuity in care and education, and support for children of all income levels and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 217). Berger has also stated that parent-teacher collaboration will help provide for success both in and out of school. Current policies in education recognize the contributions that both the parent and the teacher make in educating the child. "Neither can expect the other to accomplish the task alone" (p. 217).

Gareau (1994) also researched this area and found supporting evidence for this view. "Sharing of knowledge of the child's experiences at home and at school would help both the teacher and the parents in their respective roles as facilitators of the child's education" (p. 136).

Parent and teacher/professional relationships when children have a disability or are considered "at risk". In practice, parent and teacher relationships may in fact be particularly difficult, especially when a child has special needs. Epstein (1991) surveyed a large sample of parents to determine their reaction to teacher practices, with regard to parental involvement. One of the findings was that communication was "one way," from school to home, with little opportunity for communication from home to school.

Wilgosh (1990) found that many parents of children with a disability believe that educational opportunities are a direct result of advocacy for their child. Wilgosh suggested that there is a clear sense of frustration and lack of communication on the part of parents and teachers. Fouse, Beidelman, and Morrision (1994) also found that the parents of children with gifts and talents advocate on behalf of their children. This sometimes creates tension or an adversarial relationship. As well, Fouse et al. stated that it was the result of this advocacy that gifted programming exists today.

Leitch and Tangri (1988) studied "black families" in a low income district that were considered at risk for school failure and found: "The major impediment to home and school collaboration results from teachers' and parents' stereotypes, perceptions and lack of understanding of mutual needs. . . . Both sets of perceptions must be explored together if communication barriers are to be understood and addressed" (p.70).

Epstein (1996) indicated that there appears to be a lack of communication between home and schools, that neither the parents nor the teachers understand what the other hopes to accomplish for the children they parent and teach. Epstein, however, was clear that

school practices greatly influence parental involvement in schooling. "Teacher practices to involve families are the most influential. If schools invest in practices to involve parents, the parents respond by conducting those practices" (p.217).

Epstein (1996), in a review of the research completed in the area of home and school partnerships, indicated that the literature is clear in that teachers who involve parents have a more positive attitude towards parents and hold fewer stereotypical attitudes towards parents. In other words, involvement means that teachers begin to demonstrate an understanding of families and the pattern of behaviors that families demonstrate. Therefore, the importance of parental involvement in the education of children can not be stressed enough.

Moles (1996) stated that families have the most opportunity to influence their children by instruction and by example. He indicated that all parents want their children to do well in school and to have a positive future. He further stated that parents want to work with the school to aid in their children's education.

Parent and teacher relationships when children are gifted. Frey and Wendorf (1985) studied families of gifted children and found that, in healthy families, the relationship with the school fell into one of two categories. In the first instance, the school took the pressure off the parents by providing their child with adequate educational resources and intellectual stimulation. Parents and children respected the teachers, children reported satisfaction and a reduced sense of isolation in their gifted program; as well, they appeared to have increased self-esteem. However, from the authors' review, it is not clear what type of program was offered to this

group. The second group of parents were displeased with the gifted program; for the majority of this group the school provided the program through resource room pull-out, one hour per day. These parents reported significant conflict between home and school. One issue raised by these parents was teachers' lack of understanding of the needs of the gifted child. They also reported an increase in family conflict over school issues, and typically stated that they circumvented the school's efforts by providing program enrichment at home. This study suggests that conflict with the school may well be the "norm" when children are identified as gifted.

Frey and Wendorf (1985) found that the non-clinical, problem families reported that gifted programming took the pressure off the family. The satisfaction with school was predicated on the gifted label and taking the pressure off parents and placing it on the school. The children reported more interest and satisfaction in school as a result of the gifted program.

Frey and Wendorf (1985) studied families of children identified as gifted, and found that the families deemed to be healthy, were the families primarily in conflict with schools. These authors found that the most negative impact of education was on the healthiest families. The healthy families reported a lack of understanding of the gifted child by the school, and that both parents were involved in the conflict with the school. The authors found that the clinical population studied was more concerned with the child's behaviors at home and was unable to focus on school behavior and, therefore, the parents were less likely to be in conflict with the school over educational issues.

Hackney (1981) indicated that the school and the family interact through the child and that a crisis with one of the systems will probably affect the other. He stated, "Specifically the school has shown too little understanding of the family as a system. It has missed the point that families strive for homeostasis and have their own motivation for self-preservation" (p. 52). He suggested that, when a child has the gifted label, the relationship among home/school/child intensifies, becomes more magnified, and made more critical. Some criticisms include: if the child is disinterested, the teacher is not encouraging; if the child is a discipline problem the curriculum is not challenging enough; and if the child is compulsive with homework, then the school is putting too much pressure on the child.

Hackney (1981) indicated that communication between home and school is extremely important. Parents often feel isolated from one another and from the school. They are often confused about their role and that of the school. If this is not dealt with it can become an issue. School counsellors could play a significant role in mediating conflict.

Ross (1985), in one of the first Canadian studies on gifted families, surveyed 247 families of gifted children. She divided them into two groups, parent-identified gifted and school-identified gifted. She stated that the same concerns, as those identified by Hackney (1981), did not appear as significant in her study. However, she stated, "The future focus of research should shift to understanding the causes of parental concerns rather than simply attempting to catalog them" (p.62).

Ross (1985) listed several implications of her study for educators. They are as follows:

1. Recognition of parents' sense of responsibility for their gifted child's education.
2. Acknowledgment of the leadership role parents want to play in their child's education.
3. Acceptance of the child's special needs.
4. Information on characteristics of the gifted. Even if parents have first identified a child as gifted, they still want information on these characteristics as a confirmation of their judgment. (p. 62)

These implications suggested that there is a further need to study parent-teacher relationships in-depth. Ross (1985) did not obtain any information from teachers; she only surveyed families of gifted children. This then lends support to the need for further research into understanding the issues in educating children identified as gifted.

In summary, the relationship between parent and teacher is of particular importance in the education of all children. The research has suggested that both parents and teachers have issues which need to be addressed if they are to work together for the benefit of children.

Meeting the needs of children. Most parents would not opt for the gifted label if curriculum needs could be met without such a label (Colangelo & Fleuridas, 1986). However, Colangelo and Fleuridas found many parents have lost confidence in the ability of the regular classroom context to meet the needs of their gifted child.

Feldhusen and Kroll (1985) studied parents whose children attended a summer institute for the gifted at Purdue University. The results indicated that a large number of parents believed their gifted children's needs were not being met. The study was a survey of parents from grades 1-6. The results indicated that 70% of parents ranged from "uncertain" to "strongly disagree" with the statement, "I feel my child's needs are met in the school he/she now attends." This indicated that a significant number of the parents in the study had the perception that their child's needs were not being met within the school system.

Clark (1997) stated that gifted children have the same needs within family and school as do all other children. Unfortunately, they often receive negative responses from the adults with whom they interact, particularly within the school system. Clark stated that gifted children receive responses such as, "If you are so gifted figure it out" and, "Of course you don't need any help, you know everything" (p. 171). Clark also indicated that a lack of acknowledgment of achievement, and teachers taking their achievement for granted, were common difficulties experienced by children identified as gifted.

The shared role of educating children. Bridges (1973) stated that many parents are confused about the role they should have within the school. He suggested that parents have questions about their role, and the types of programs suitable for their children. Dettmann and Colangelo (1980) indicated that the involvement of parents in the education of their gifted children can be a positive force. However, the authors also stated that many parents are confused about the role parents play in the school. Parents may want

to participate in their child's education but are not sure exactly where they fit in. Mathews (1981) indicated that a parent's signature on the Individual Education Plan is frequently the outstanding feature of a parent meeting. However, Mathews stated that parents should have the opportunity to have input into their child's education.

Colangelo and Dettman (1983) indicated that the importance of parents in social and educational development of their children is often underscored within the educational community. However, the above authors suggested a lack of empirical literature giving direction for parental involvement. ". . . Schools have not provided direction for participation: when such direction has been provided, it has not been specific enough to be fruitful" (p. 25). They went on to say that this area needs careful consideration. "Cooperation between home and school is very important because close cooperation between parents, peers, school and community will foster the gifted child's talents" (p. 25).

Attitudes towards children identified as gifted. Friedman and Gallagher (1991) indicated that, when it comes to gifted children, there is an attitude that gifted children will make it on their own, gifted children have something for nothing, and providing gifted programming contributes to an elitist attitude. The cultural milieu is extremely important in understanding the obstacles that face many parents attempting to provide for the gifted child's educational needs (Colangelo, 1985; Dettmer, 1985; Friedman & Gallagher, 1991).

Dettmer (1985), in a study of attitudes towards gifted children, showed that many teachers, principals, and psychologists lack some understanding of the needs of gifted children. For example, one of

the items that the groups were asked to respond to was: "Gifted children are influenced greatly by the emotional climate in the home and the school room" (p. 256). While teachers of the gifted, school principals, and psychologists generally agreed with this statement, the regular classroom teachers showed the lowest overall agreement with the statement. The study indicated that the different groups were not always in agreement and that they may not have enough knowledge of the literature and the needs of the gifted students.

Clark (1997) stated that when parents of children identified as gifted are faced with a classroom which does not meet the needs of their children, the parents often do nothing and trust that the schools know best. Other parents will complain just enough to make teachers defensive. Clark suggested that it is more effective if parents and teachers use a cooperative effort to affect change.

In summary, there has been a great deal of research in the area of family issues and teacher issues. In terms of the general population, there has been much research into parent and teacher relationships. However, there have been few research studies investigating the specific area of parent teacher relationships when children are identified as gifted. There is a suggestion that the relationship is an important one for the benefit of the child, and one that requires further study. The literature has suggested that parents want to be involved in the education of their children but that there is confusion around the role that a parent should play. There is also a suggestion that parents are looking for guidance and direction from the school. Also, there may be some attitudes and misperceptions that interfere with the development of healthy working relationships between parents and teachers.

## Chapter Three

## Methods and Procedures

There have been a number of studies completed at the University of Alberta investigating parenting children with specific disabilities. In these studies themes emerged that suggested issues with respect to parent-teacher relationships and issues in meeting the needs of children once they entered the school system. There has not been a study on parenting children identified as gifted; therefore, this researcher believed that it would be important to look at the issues that are important to parents when children are identified as gifted. During an early pilot interview the main themes that emerged were school and teacher related. Therefore, the current study was modified to look at parent and teacher issues when children were identified as gifted.

Research methodologies used to investigate this topic needed to be able to provide both depth and richness of experience. For this reason qualitative methodology was the chosen paradigm. The current research study investigated the experiences of parents and teachers when the children they parent and teach are identified as gifted.

### Qualitative Methodology

There are basically two types of scientific inquiry; quantitative and qualitative. Patton (1990) stated that the two methods are as follows:

> (1) logical-positivism, which uses quantitative and experimental methods to test hypothetical-deductive

> generalizations versus (2), phenomenological inquiry, using qualitative and naturalistic approaches to inductively and holistically understand human experience in context specific settings. (p. 37)

The choice of methods used in research is based on the question the researcher is looking to answer. A goodness of fit between the method of inquiry and the paradigm (set of beliefs guiding the inquiry) is essential. Van Manen (1990) stated that the "questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the methods as such" (p. 1). This researcher attempted to generate descriptive data to explore the relationship between parents and teachers when children are identified as gifted. Qualitative research is considered to be discovery oriented and therefore was an appropriate methodology for this exploratory research study. Qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to approach a field of study without preconceived ideas and to ". . . study selected issues in-depth and detail" (Patton, 1990, p. 13).

Qualitative research is an umbrella term for many approaches to studying within the inductive paradigm, including phenomenology (Patton, 1990). The methods used for the design, data collection and analysis of this study, are drawn from many writers in the qualitative paradigm; however, the writings of Van Manen (1990) and Collaizzi (1978), which follow a phenomenological tradition, were the primary ones used in the analysis phase of this study.

Van Manen (1990) stated that ". . . the aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a contextual expression of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive

reliving. . ."(p. 36). Phenomenological inquiry is the translation of the philosophy into a research method. Osborne (1990) pointed out that this is more of an orientation than a methodology, therefore, for the purpose of simplicity and clarity the term qualitative research will be used to encompass the methods used in this study.

The flexibility of qualitative methods allowed the researcher to use a variety of methods for co-researcher selection as well as analysis of the data. The rationale for the use of the writings of Van Manen (1990) and Collaizzi (1978) for analysis is that the writings and methods outlined by these authors provided structure (Collaizzi) as well as flexibility (Van Manen) to the analysis. The methods of each of these are outlined under separate sections in this chapter. As well, Marshall & Rossman (1989) suggested a need for flexibility as ". . . tightly structured, highly organized data gathering and analyzing schemes often filter out the unusual, the serendipitous - the puzzle that if attended to and pursued, would provide a recasting of the entire research endeavor. Thus a balance must be struck between efficiency considerations and design flexibility" (p. 113).

Van Manen (1990) stated that "phenomenology is such that it posits itself as an approach towards research which is presuppositionless; in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency towards constructing a predetermined set of fixtures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project. . . . they need to be discovered or invented as a response to the question at hand" (p. 29).

This researcher has chosen to look directly at the first hand experiences of parents and teachers to gain an insight into their personal perspectives. The methods employed in this study reflect

the underlying principles of a descriptive, exploratory approach; using interviews as the main data source, recognizing the ongoing nature of reality, and attempting to gain understanding of the phenomenon.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into seven main topic areas. First the issues of validation will be discussed. Then the research sample will be discussed and information on the co-researchers will be provided. Methods of data collection will be presented as well as methods used in the analysis phase. In another section, the researcher will provide the reader with the ethical considerations. Finally, the researcher will review the limitation of the current study.

## Validation

### Trustworthiness and Rigor

Rigor is one of the key issues in qualitative research and the methods used to ensure rigor are tied intricately to validity (internal and external), reliability and objectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1983) Strategies for dealing with threats to trustworthiness and rigor are outlined throughout this chapter. Patton (1990) suggested that the researcher implement strategies in the construction of the study, the implementation of the data collection, and the analysis of the data, to ensure that the results are trustworthy.

The terms trustworthiness and rigor vary in meaning according to the research question and the stage of the research. Rigor looks at issues surrounding believability (Glaser, 1978) and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in each stage of the research process. Bibby (1993) in judging a research study asks such questions as: Is the research plausible to the reader?, Does the report account for the

data? Are the findings tied to the data? and Does the research lead to hypotheses and additional investigations?

Validity

Maxwell (1992) argued that the concepts of reliability and validity from quantitative research are not incompatible with qualitative research. Maxwell, in his approach to qualitative research, described five concepts in establishing the trustworthiness of qualitative research; descriptive validity, interpretative validity, theoretical validity, generalizability and evaluative validity. Only the first four of these concepts will be reviewed as they relate to this specific study.

Descriptive validity. Descriptive validity deals with ensuring the "factual accuracy" of the data. In this study, descriptive validity was accounted for by first reviewing all transcripts in conjunction with recording and correcting any errors. Also, during this process, it allowed the researcher to further validate the transcripts and note the nuances of the spoken interview, of "stress and pitch," which are as important as what is spoken. Maxwell refers to this as "primary descriptive validity: . . . the researcher reports having seen or heard (or touched or smelled or so on)" (p. 286). Secondly, returning the transcripts to each co-researcher for feedback and clarification also increased the descriptive validity of this study.

Interpretive validity. Interpretative validity refers to the concern that researchers have with "meaning" and how it correctly reflects the experiences of the co-researchers. Interpretive validity is essential when the researcher moves beyond text to constructing an interpretation that goes beyond the co-researchers' spoken words.

Interpretive validity is the analysis of the language or a phenomenon in terms of meaning,

based in the context of the experience. A strategy employed by this researcher to ensure interpretative validity was the use, as much as possible, the co-researchers own words. Maxwell (1992) suggested the use of "thick" description in presenting the co-researchers' experiences. This researcher attempted, where possible, to use the co-researchers' own words in the theme construction.

A second strategy employed during this study was researcher disclosure. This is a process that the researcher used to describe, beforehand and through data collection and analysis, presuppositions which may have biased the interpretation. Continuous disclosure was completed through the use of field notes detailing personal perspectives and reactions throughout the entire research process. Also, a careful review was completed of each transcript to ensure that the style of questioning (open-ended) allowed the co-researchers to tell their experiences without researcher influence.

Another strategy to ensure interpretative validity was the continuing dialogue between the researcher and co-researchers. The final interview results were brought back with the thematic analysis to confirm the validity and accuracy of interpretations. As well one parent and one teacher were used to validate the combined themes.

Theoretical validity. Theoretical validity refers to the degree of resonance between community experts and the theoretical construction that the researcher develops or brings to the study. Theoretical validity is rooted in theory, which has two parts: concepts and categories; and the relationship between these concepts and categories. Strategies used during this study included bringing the

themes back to the co-researchers, who are considered experts in their own experiences. This researcher also reviewed studies looking at teaching and parenting.

Generalizability. Maxwell (1992) suggested that generalizability refers to being able to extend the results "to other persons, times, or settings" ( 293). Maxwell suggested two areas, internal generalizability and external generalizability. Qualitative research is more concerned with internal generalizability, however most qualitative research is not designed to be generalized beyond the individuals studied. Instead generalization is left to the reader to make meaningful connections with findings that speak of the commonalties of experience. Sandelowski (1986) suggested that generalizability can be found in the specific, however this may be somewhat of an illusion because ". . . every research situation is about a particular researcher in interaction with a particular context" ( p. 31). Maxwell suggested that generalizability is often completed through the use of theory development and the comparison of the theory to attempt to make sense of other persons or situations studied. This was done in the final chapter of this document in which a comparison is made between other groups that have children with special needs.

Reliability

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) referred to reliability, in qualitative research, as dependability. For the qualitative researcher, reliability refers to the fit between what is recorded and what actually occurs in the setting under study. Sandelowski (1986) stated that qualitative research is credible when humans having had experience with the phenomenon would immediately recognize it from those

descriptions or interpretations, as their own. "Truth value" generally resides in the discovery of human phenomena rather than in some preconceived criteria as seen in quantitative research. In quantitative research, the researchers enter the study with a set of hypotheses which they test through their research. In qualitative research, the researcher enters the research without any hypotheses, and therefore is discovery-oriented.

Triangulation

One approach used to strengthen the reliability of the findings in qualitative research is through triangulation. Triangulation is a term, derived from surveying, that implies multiple measures (Patton, 1990). Denzin (1978) identified four types of triangulation that are applicable to qualitative research; data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation. "Designing a study in which multiple cases are used, multiple informants or more than one data gathering technique can greatly strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings" (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p. 146). Two types of triangulation, that used a number of different strategies, were employed during this study; they are as follows.

Data triangulation. Data triangulation is when the researcher utilizes a variety of data sources to increase the credibility of the data collected. When a researcher is able to achieve a degree of consistency across data sources, then the researcher is more confident in the findings. During this study the researcher used various sources of information from the literature, used multiple interviews and obtained validation from the co-researchers themselves.

Also this study used the perspective of two groups, for example both parents and teachers were interviewed. This further enhances the data and gives more credibility to the findings.

Investigator triangulation. Investigator triangulation is when the researcher uses a variety of evaluators to analyze the data. In this study the researcher used three experienced teachers to review the themes derived from the teacher data. The teachers were graduate-level Special Education students at the University of Alberta. One of these teachers was responsible for the development and implementation of a gifted program in her school district. The use of these teachers was extremely helpful to the researcher to provide a "teacher perspective" to the analysis. The major theme headings remained in place as a result of these discussions, however, the focus of some of the themes changed. These teachers forced the researcher to pull back and "look at the bigger picture," and to re-examine the data to determine if this bigger picture was present in the data.

The researcher had a narrow focus on the data, only looking at the teacher comments, and did not recognize the political statements as important to the study. One area, specifically looking at funding, was moved from a level of teacher complaint about the interactions with parents to one that looked at the political climate and the cuts to educational funding. Upon re-examination of the teacher transcripts, the researcher was able to confirm the perspective and validate the themes.

During the analysis of the parent themes, a parent of four children (three of whom have been identified by their school system as gifted), who was also a doctoral student, verified the themes

derived from the parent data. She explored the themes in detail with the researcher, through discussion and analysis of the parent protocols. The final theme structure was a result of ongoing discussion and meetings with this doctoral student.

Researcher Competence

Marshall and Rossman (1989) stated that ". . . the writer must explicitly and implicitly demonstrate competence" (p.13). First this researcher has a background in social work/counselling and special education. The researcher has had five years of experience working with families in a social services agency and two years working with children and families in a school system. As well, the researcher has had ten years of experience as a parent of a child identified as gifted and five years of experience as a parent with this child's school.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) stated that competence can also be demonstrated through completing a pilot study in the desired area of study. This researcher completed a pilot study in June and July 1995, in which one parent and one teacher were interviewed to discuss their views on parent/teacher relationships. This pilot study allowed the researcher to complete a small sample and to work out the difficulties in the proposed larger study. The major change that resulted from completing a "pilot" was the interview style. Subsequent to the pilot the researcher changed from a semi-structured interview format to a completely open-ended format. The rationale was to allow co-researcher's to express their stories, to talk about significant issues in their lives and not have any questions imposed by the researcher. In the pilot study the researcher felt that the themes that did emerged may have been due to the questions imposed by the researcher. Therefore, some of the

researchers pre-conceived ideas, as a result of her own experiences with the schools and through reading the existing literature, may have influenced the results.

## Sampling

### Selecting Co-researchers

It is important to investigate people who have had experience with the phenomenon being investigated. Colaizzi (1978) stated, "Experience with the investigated topic and articulateness suffice as criteria for selecting subjects" (p. 58). Using this criterion, the sample was a "purposeful" one (Patton, 1990). The co-researchers of a purposeful sample generally are selected based on specific characteristics or specific knowledge in which the researcher is interested. "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study" (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

The criterion for inclusion for parents was having their children identified as gifted by their respective schools. The criterion for teachers was experience teaching children identified as gifted, in a regular classroom, pull-out program, or a full-time segregated classroom.

Teacher co-researchers. The researcher, in conjunction with the University of Alberta cooperative research activities initiative, advertised for co-researchers through two large urban Canadian School Boards for teachers from a variety of programs (e.g., full-time segregated classrooms, pull out programs, in-class enrichment). Only one teacher volunteered through this process, and after the first interview, withdrew from the study. The researcher inquired about the teacher's withdrawal and the teacher stated that she felt that she

was too negative in her perceptions of parents and felt that this would bias the study.

Subsequently, advertising was done directly through the schools provided by the one Board, and through the gifted coordinator in the second Board, however no other teachers were forthcoming. As a result, this researcher advertised through the University of Alberta and through word of mouth in an attempt to obtain teacher co-researchers for this study.

The teachers interviewed were asked for the names of other teachers who have experience with children identified as gifted. The researcher purposefully sought out teachers from regular classrooms and Academic Challenge programs at different grade levels to be interviewed. Therefore the range of teachers interviewed represented 'maximum variation," as outlined by Patton (1990). However, as a result of this style of sampling, all co-researchers were employed by the one school Board.

The advantage of maximum variation in co-researchers is that when commonalties are found in varied co-researchers it increases the confidence in the findings (Patton, 1990). The teacher co-researchers that participated in this study consisted of two junior high school teachers, one from a regular classroom and one from a segregated Academic Challenge programs; and two elementary teachers, one from the regular classroom and one from a segregated Academic Challenge. Two of the teachers that participated in this study were familiar to this researcher prior to the study, however, there was no previous relationship either professionally or personally. This researcher interviewed all teacher co-researchers that volunteered.

The teachers that volunteered for this study had from 7 to 20 years of teaching experience. Two of the teachers had a Master of Education degree completed at the time of the study, one teacher had a Masters degree partially completed, and one teacher had a undergraduate degree completed. All the teachers were female.

Parent co-researchers. The parents for this study were located through a variety of sources. First, the researcher advertised through the University of Alberta bulletin boards and through the Alberta Association for Bright Children. Also, the researcher advertised through the Parent Associations in seven schools across a large urban area. This advertising brought forth one parent volunteer (See Appendix C).

As a result of the lack of volunteers found through formal channels, the researcher then used informal methods of finding parent volunteers. The parent co-researchers were found through advertising through the University of Alberta, and using word of mouth. Four parents volunteered through this method. This method of sampling would again be considered "purposeful sampling." The parent volunteers were all unfamiliar to the researcher prior to the commencement of this research; there was no personal or professional relationship with any of the co-researchers. Four of the parent co-researchers were from one school Board and one parent co-researcher was from a second Board.

The parents interviewed for this study came from a variety of educational backgrounds. One parent had completed a technical program, one parent had a partially completed education degree, one parent had a undergraduate arts degree and another parent had a Masters (Science) degree. The final parent had a Ph.D. completed at

the time of interview. The parents consisted of one father and four mothers.

Sample Size

One of the issues in qualitative research is sample size. One principle often used in determining sample size is the concept of "saturation" (Glaser, 1978; Patton, 1990). Saturation occurs when one achieves redundancy in information gathered. This is often the criterion used by researchers in qualitative research for ending data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, for the sample used in this study the researchers interviewed all co-researchers that volunteered and a sample size of five parents and four teachers was, therefore, used in this study. Data collection was then discontinued, in consultation with the dissertation supervisor, and was limited in part, to the time and financial resources of the researcher.

## Data Collection

### The Sources of Data

The co-researchers in this study were all interviewed as a primary data source. The co-researchers were given a choice of interview environment. Some choose to be interviewed in their homes, some choose to be interviewed at the university, and others choose to be interviewed in their place of employment.

Each co-researcher was informed, prior to beginning the interview, of the nature of this particular research study. Co-researchers were asked to be involved in two interviews: the initial interview, which provided the main data source; and the second interview, which was used for clarification of the information obtained in the first interview. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were checked against the

original tapes to ensure accuracy. This strategy was used to enhance the accuracy and the credibility of the data source (Patton, 1990). One parent co-researcher and one teacher co-researcher were asked to participate in a third informal interview, in which the researcher sought to validated the combined themes. The choice of parent and teacher co-researcher for the third interview was based on availability. All interviews took place between September 1995 and April 1997.

The co-researchers were required to sign a consent form, agreeing to have their interviews tape-recorded (see Appendix A). The co-researchers were also informed in writing of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process.

Initial interview. The primary source of data collection was in-depth open-ended interviews. Patton (1990) stated that this format allows the co-researchers to discuss at length the phenomenon under study without imposing the researcher's preconceived perception on the data. "The basic thrust of qualitative research is to minimize the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering data. . . .This means that questions should permit respondents to respond in their own terms" (p. 295).

During the initial interview the parents were given the following instructions: "Starting at the time your child entered school describe for me the experiences you have had with your child's teachers. You are welcome to discuss anything that you view as important. I am looking for your experiences of your relationships with teachers and your child's school." The only other questions asked by the researcher were clarifying and expanding questions if an issue was vague or unclear.

During the initial interview the teachers were given the following instructions; "Basically you have two options. You may start at the beginning of your teaching experience and describe your experiences with parents of children identified as gifted and go through the years in a chronology, or you may hit on whatever you think is important to learn about. Any highlights that you think are important in terms of parent and teacher relationships are what I am primarily interested in. So you are welcome to discuss a particular child, or a particular class you have taught." The only other questions asked by the researcher were clarifying and expanding questions if some issue was vague or unclear.

Follow-up interviews. Prior to the follow-up interview each co-researcher was provided with a copy of his/her initial transcript. A follow-up interview was completed with co-researchers. This interview was also transcribed verbatim. The focus of the follow-up interview was based on the analysis of the first interview. During the second interview, the researcher reviewed with the co-researchers the themes derived from the first interview. These themes were expanded and some of the emphasis was changed in many of the follow-up interviews.

A third informal interview was used for one teacher co-researcher and one parent co-researcher. The purpose of this was to have the teacher and parent review the combined themes and to ensure that a description of their experiences was captured. For example, the initial analysis of the data broke down the Theme 5. Problematic Behavior into four areas: physical symptoms, emotional symptoms, peer interactions and teacher child interactions. After the validating interview the subtheme were collapsed into two

subthemes: Subtheme 5: 1. Physical and Emotional Responses; and Subtheme 5: 2. Teacher Child interaction. The researcher then returned to all the transcripts and reread them to ensure that this was an accurate representation of the parents' stories.

Journal Writing

A second source of data for this research study was a reflective journal kept by the researcher. Journal writing is compatible with qualitative research and has the potential to enhance data collection (Craig, 1983). In qualitative research, there is a need to include the researcher's reaction to a particular topic, to record bias and underlying assumptions.

In an attempt to objectify research, many researchers ignore, omit or attempt to conceal their feelings. However, all researchers hold bias, simply by choosing a particular area to study. It is the omission of these feelings that creates a false picture. The reader is not provided with the contextual information, the lens through which the researcher views the data (Berg, 1989). By stating biases and writing them down, the researcher is able to keep them in mind during data collection and data analysis and it serves the purpose of keeping the researcher aware of these preconceptions. Therefore, the researcher is more likely to use caution in both data collection and interpretation of the results (Patton, 1990). By keeping a journal, the researcher wrote biases, perception and opinions, attended to the research and thereby it is believed that this enhanced the quality of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The journal was also used to record descriptions from the field on what had been observed, and to identify areas which could be explored in more depth during succeeding interviews. The journal

included everything that occurred during the research and was analyzed during the analysis component of this research study (Glaser, 1978).

Another data source during this research was to keep a journal of decisions and why things were done. This is considered an "audit trail" and it allows others to determine why decisions were made, for what purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the decisions (Patton, 1990). This is an important aspect that may allow such research to be replicated. It allows others to judge the credibility of the research and may provide information to defend the research decisions. "The qualitative researcher has an obligation to be methodical in reporting sufficient details of data collection and analysis to permit others to judge the quality of the resulting product" (Patton, 1990, p. 462).

Researcher Disclosure

Subjectivity verses objectivity is a debated topic in qualitative research. In qualitative research it is essential that the researcher identify his/her bias in an attempt to reduce the influences of these personal presuppositions about the phenomenon that the researcher brings to the research process. In the present study this was accomplished through keeping a personal reflective journal and through self-reflection. The researcher has separated these into two areas; first, personal experiences with the phenomena under study and second, experiences working on this research study. Researcher disclosures are extremely important in ensuring the trustworthiness of data collection, data analysis and interpretation. Researcher disclosure, for the present study, was done through the engaging in reflective periods, in which the researcher spent time analyzing the

findings, analyzing her reactions to the data, looking at the consistency with respect to her own personal experiences, as well as questioning herself and the finding to determine if they were appropriate.

Personal experiences. In a qualitative paradigm "the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation" (Patton, 1990, p.54). Subjectivity is often viewed negatively and is held in contrast to objectivity. It implies opinion rather than fact. Patton (1990) stated that, because of this negative connotation that to openly advocate the value of subjectivity would run the risk of losing credibility. Subjectivity can in fact be a positive trait as long as the subjectivity is stated. Researchers must state beforehand their interpretations, otherwise these interpretations can cloud data collection and analysis.

"Subjectivity means that one needs to be perceptive, insightful and discerning as one can be in order to show or disclose the object in its full richness and in its greatest depth. Subjectivity means we are strong in our orientation to the object of our study in a unique and personal way while avoiding the dangers of becoming arbitrary, self-indulgent, or of getting captivated and carried away by unreflected preconceptions" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 20). This supports the idea that subjectivity can provide a positive element to research.

The researcher needs to present these preconception in order to deal with them. Difficulty may occur and create invalid results when researchers proceed with data collection and analysis based on preconceived hypotheses (Guba & Lincoln, 1983). Therefore, stating preconceptions gives the advantage of presenting the point of view of the researcher. Keeping them in mind (in sight) during data

collection and data analysis allows the researcher to be constantly aware of his/her preconceptions and makes the preconceptions more real. Also it shows that the researcher is not attempting to hide his/her bias and has reflected on his/her various aspects related to the study.

Personal preconceptions. My first experience with giftedness began within my family of origin. As a child with two older siblings who were academically gifted, I often envied the speed of learning and the lack of effort, and felt that they were so lucky. They rarely had to study or work for good grades. My bias is one that views gifted children as somehow luckier than their age peers. As a young adult I had the experience of having a gifted nephew, which further broadened my view of giftedness. I saw that all was not necessarily positive particularly from a parental point of view, especially when my nephew reached school age and his parents began to look for educational placements for him in a school system in which they both were employed.

Then I had a child of my own, who was identified as gifted by the school system. Having had a personal experience with giftedness makes it easy for me to be aware of parental issues and to have an interest in this study. Having an understanding makes me sensitive to the issues but at the same time may create some difficulty, particularly when there was not a match between my experiences and those of my co-researchers. There may be the danger of trying to make a match and also a danger of a false sense of security in my awareness. I attempted to deal with this issue by involving a peer, a fellow doctoral student, who is also a parent of children who are identified as gifted. We had ongoing discussion about the study and

the findings, we were not always in agreement as to what statements meant, and we were able to reconcile our differences by going back through the co-researchers transcripts. The final authority on the meaning was left to the co-researchers.

During the course of this study and during the writing of this dissertation, I also have had the additional experiences of having my third child diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Delay and have had the experience of this child entering the school system. This experience had made me sensitive to parent issues when attempting to meet the needs of this child, but, in some respects, may have clouded my ability to take on the teacher's perspective. Recognizing this, I attempted to compensate by involving teachers in the process of analysis.

Experiences as a result of this study. I have also had the opportunity to review the research literature specifically in the areas of parenting gifted children and giftedness in general, as well as the literature on parent-teacher relationships. I believe that this was positive in that it provided the theory on which to base my research. Prior to researching the literature my concept of giftedness was limited to my own experiences and that view was academic in nature. The research literature has substantially broadened my view to include giftedness beyond just academic giftedness.

During my literature review I also searched for information on parenting other "special needs" populations. I believed that it was important to view this area for possible overlap and my bias is that parents of gifted children have some similar experiences to those parents who have children with mental challenges. My assumption is that any child who is outside the average range creates pressure

on the family. The family has to treat that child differently, for example, providing extra attention, and this may put pressure on the family's financial situation. My belief is that these children also provide significant challenges within school systems.

Having completed a review of the literature has definitely changed my concepts of giftedness, and has broadened my understanding of the issues that parents and teachers face. This review influenced the nature of the questions that were asked of the co-researchers during the pilot study. However, the pilot study also influenced the questioning in the larger study. I believed that some of the issues that came out of the pilot may have been a result of the style of questioning (semi-structured interview format) and in keeping with gaining an understanding of the phenomenon I believed it was important to allow the co-researchers to tell their own stories (opened-ended interview format).

I also believe that each interview that I completed had an effect on me personally. I became familiar with the issues and possibly this may have influenced my understanding and orientation towards the study. "We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (Van Manen, 1990). I think that we can not help but be influenced and changed by our experience.

I also believe that my personal experiences have influenced this study. It was difficult to remain "objective," however, I do not necessarily view this as negative. Having experience with the phenomenon may put me at an advantage in my understanding, although the reverse may also be true.

Having had no personal experience with teaching may have put me at an disadvantage in completing this study as I found myself more oriented to the parent perspective. I attempted to guard against this by having three experienced teachers (One Masters and two Ph.D students) act as validators for the themes identified. I used one of the interviewed co-researchers as a guide; she spent four hour reviewing and discussing the themes with me, and after this session I went back to the original data to ensure that her interpretation was representative of all the interviewed teachers. Finally, I believe that taking the teacher perspective was the more difficult for me, mainly due to my lack of teaching experience and possibly as a result of being a parent.

I also attempted to orient myself to teachers by reviewing a qualitative doctoral dissertation on teaching. Daniel (1991) completed her doctoral dissertation, Teaching as Hermeneutic, at the University Alberta. I found that reading this served two purposes; first, it was an excellent orienting experience and secondly, it helped me validate some of the aspects of the theme structure of my own co-researchers.

## Data Analysis

### Interview Data

As stated earlier, procedures outlined by Colaizzi (1978), with some modifications from the work of Van Manen (1990), were used for analysis of the data collected. Colaizzi advised that these procedures be used as a guide and not be considered definitive. The researcher transcribed two of the five parent audio-tapes and two of the teacher transcripts. This process was useful in orienting and immersing the researcher in the data. The remaining two teacher

transcripts and the three parent transcripts were transcribed by a professional secretary at the University of Alberta. Each transcript was reviewed for accuracy; there were some errors which were corrected. All parent interviews were completed first, then analyzed and grouped in a thematic structure prior to the commencement of the teacher interviews. There was a five month lapse between parent analysis and teacher analysis. The researcher attempted keep both groups separate and therefore believed that the time between the analysis would allow the researcher to orient herself in one group at a time. The following process, as described, was used for both groups.

The researcher first read each co-researcher's descriptions in order to acquire a feeling for them, making sense out of them. This process allowed the researcher to be extremely familiar with each person's transcripts. Also, all the researchers journal entries for each individual co-researcher were reviewed so that the researcher was able to get a contextual feel for the data.

The researcher then returned to all the protocols and used a "detailed line-by-line approach" (Van Manen 1990, p. 93) for analysis. Seidman (1991) stated, "if you err, err on the side of inclusion. As you repeat the winnowing process you can always exclude materials. . ." (p. 91). The rationale for this approach was, first, as Seidman stated, to err on the side of inclusion and this approach allowed a very detailed description.

For the parents in this study, the approach was important in ensuring accuracy due to the researcher's personal experiences with the phenomenon. Finally, for the teachers, it was also important to use a line by line approach, due to the researcher's lack of teaching

experience and, thereby, possibly using a parent perspective in the analysis. This process added validity to the themes. (See discussion on reliability and validity related to these issues.)

Then each statement was given a "meaning;" this is known as *formulating meanings*. For example, the statement: "I mean, he worked on multiplication the year before, that's 'peanuts,'" was interpreted to mean the child worked at a higher level the previous year. This was then included in the theme Curriculum needs of children. (See Appendix D for sample theme development). Here the researcher is engaged in a process that can not be precisely delineated, for here the researcher is involved in creative insight; the researcher must leap from what the subjects say to what they mean. The researcher must go beyond what is given in the original data and at the same time stay with it (Colaizzi, 1978).

The researcher repeated each of the above procedures for each protocol and organized and aggregated formulated meanings into clusters of themes. Once this step is complete the researcher attempts to validate the themes. This was done by going back to the original data to determine if anything in the original transcripts was missed in the cluster of themes, and to determine if the cluster of themes proposed anything that was not implied in the original protocol. (This procedure strengthens and increases the credibility of the findings).

The results were then integrated into an detailed description of the researched topic. Each specific theme cluster will be described in detail in Chapters 4 (parents) and 5 (teachers) in an attempt to allow the reader to capture the experiences of the co-researchers.

A final validating step involved returning to each subject and having the co-researchers view the descriptions to confirm and extend the data. Any relevant new data would be worked into the final description (Colaizzi, 1978).

Also, the researcher brought the combined theme clusters back to one teacher and one parent to ensure validity. As well, due to the researcher's inexperience in teaching and experience with parenting, three experienced teachers familiar to the researcher was used to complete validity checks on the teachers' data and themes to ensure accuracy. As well, one parent of three children identified as gifted was used to validate the parent themes. This provided more confidence in the analysis of the data and added to its trustworthiness. "Triangulated conclusions are more stable than any individual vantage point from which they were triangulated" (Guba & Lincoln, 1983, p. 107).

The researcher attempted to obtain alternative explanations for the data. This was done by comparing interview to interview, by looking at each interview and attempting to provide alternative explanations. In using this method the researcher attempts to look for information that supported a rival hypothesis. It is the failure of locating supporting evidence for contrary interpretations that helps increase the confidence of the original theme (Patton, 1990). This process was also completed by discussion with three experienced teachers in the topic area. (See Appendix D for sample theme development)

Journal Data

The journal data were also analyzed. The researcher read all corresponding journal entries after the initial reading of the

transcripts. The journal entries were used to give the contextual information that is so important to analysis. The journal writings were analyzed in conjunction with the transcripts. The same procedures were used to analyze journal entries as outlined above.

Ethical Considerations

A substantial ethical issue is the confidentiality of the data. The co-researchers' anonymity was protected; each co-researcher was given a code and names were not used. In addition, no identifying information, for example, school names, were included in the final report.

Confidentiality safeguards were discussed with the co-researchers prior to beginning the interview. At that time, co-researchers were informed why their experiences were being studied, how the information was to be collected and how the information would be used. They were also advised of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and that their transcripts (if already completed) would be returned to them or destroyed at the discretion of the co-researcher.

Prior to participation in this study, all parents and all teachers were requested to sign a consent form (see Appendix A), indicating their willingness to participate in audio-taped interviews, guarantying anonymity to themselves and granting them control over the interview data. They were given the right to delete or add information to the written transcript throughout the study.

To ensure that all ethical considerations were fully screened, the researcher formally submitted an application to the Ethics Committee, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta. The purpose was to ensure that all guidelines for research

will human subjects were followed and to protect the co-researchers of the study. The Ethics Committee granted approval based on the design of the study.

Limitations of the Study

General limitations. Due to the small sample size, as well as the interview format of this study, the results cannot be generalized beyond the parents and teachers who were interviewed. The parents and teachers discussed their experiences in retrospect and, therefore, these experiences may have been clouded by the passage of time. As well, the experiences are difficult to capture in the spoken interview; peoples' experiences often cannot be accurately expressed in words.

This study was further limited by geographic area; all parents lived in a large urban Canadian city. Another limitation of this study was in the instrumentation. In qualitative research the researcher is considered the instrument. The present researcher has had experience with parenting but not teaching. Therefore, she had more difficulty taking the teachers' perspective. Therefore the biases of the researcher in the interpretation of the data further limit the results.

The study was limited by the definition of giftedness that was imposed by the school system. The study, therefore, included only children who were academically gifted and excluded children with other gifts and talents.

Limitations specific to the parent sample. Only parents of children identified by their respective school system (or through private assessment) as gifted were able to participate in this study. By virtue of the identification criteria imposed by the school systems

their children attended, the sample was limited. As well, four parents were from one school system and only one was from a separate system. The experiences described by the parents co-researchers was, therefore, further limited by the program options available, and the parents' choice of program.

The study was limited in that all parents that volunteered were, relative to the general population, well educated and Caucasian. Therefore, this study can not be generalized to other parents from different economic or cultural backgrounds.

Limitations specific to the teacher sample. The sample of teachers was diverse. Teachers from the different programs spoke of many issues, some of which did not overlap across programs. It is possible a larger sample would provide validation for some of the issues that arose, in individual teachers' theme analysis, to emerge as themes. For example, the one teacher in a lower socio-economic school suggested that parents, and their interaction with the schools in the lower socio-economic groups, are different from those in more affluent areas of the city. The only way to verify this concept would be to investigate this population specifically.

Only teachers who have had experiences programming for and teaching children identified as gifted were included in this study. Therefore, the study was limited by the criteria imposed for selection of teacher co-researchers, thereby possibly eliminating from study those whose experiences are similar but do not meet the criteria.

The study was also limited by the education level of the teachers interviewed. Two teaches had a completed Masters degree and one teacher has a Masters degree partially completed.

Therefore, the education level may impact on the result and the findings can not be generalized to other teachers.

Summary

This research study on parents' and teachers' views, of the issues involved in the parent and teacher relationship when children are identified as gifted, was conducted using qualitative methodology. The methodology used was descriptive and exploratory, aiming to gain an understanding of parent and teacher relationships from both parents and teachers. Such research is relevant in that parents are being asked to take on more responsibility in the education of their children and the running of the schools through Parent Councils. It is essential that we gain this understanding so that parents and educators can work together effectively.

The main source of data was the spoken interview with secondary data sources including journal writing and related literature reviews. The primary method of analysis was thematic, as outlined by Colaizzi (1978) and Van Manen (1990). The study has some limitations which impact on the findings and the ability to generalize these results.

The following chapters will discuss the results. The researcher has divided the parent and teacher co-researchers into separate Chapters (Chapter 4, parent data; Chapter 5, teacher data), and finally a discussion chapter (Chapter 6), that will look at the overlap that exists between the groups' data. A comparison will be provided between this study and the results of a pilot study completed in June 1995. As well, the findings will be discussed in relationship to the available literature in this area.

## Chapter 4

### Parent Themes

The following themes are derived from two interviews with each of five parents of children identified as gifted. The initial interview was open-ended format. The parents were asked to describe their experiences with school from the time their children entered kindergarten. The parents were further instructed that the present researcher was interested in their experiences, that they could discuss any experience that they felt was important, but that the researcher was interested in their stories. The following is the actual script used by the researcher: "Starting at the time your child entered school, describe for me the experiences you have had with your child's teachers. You are welcome to discuss anything that you view as important. I am looking for your experiences of your relationships with teachers and your child's school." The only other questions asked by the researcher were clarifying and expanding questions if an issue was vague or unclear. These questions were neutral, for example, "Can you tell me more about . . .?" or You stated . . . can you explain this further?"

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. The analysis of the initial interview was brought back to the parent for elaboration, verification, and modification. After the second interview, the individual theme structures (case by case) were revised.

In a second stage, after completion of the analysis of each of the individual parent themes, on-going discussions were conducted with a parent not in the sample, a doctoral graduate student with

three identified gifted children. The discussions centered on combining the themes of the individual parents, and deciding on the most appropriate theme structure to represent all parents. There was significant overlap in the content of many of the themes and together we reached agreement on the final theme structure.

The third stage was to bring back the final combined themes to one parent interviewed for the study to determine if the themes accurately represented her experience. The themes remained intact after this process, there was again elaboration, but she endorsed the compiled themes as representing her experiences. (The third stage was not part of the proposed study; it was completed to balance the research study, after the researcher felt it necessary to complete a follow-up interview with one teacher.)

The children of the parents in this study had experiences with many of the different options used by their schools for programming for children identified as gifted. These included the regular classroom (all children); regular classroom with acceleration (two children); grade acceleration (two children); French Immersion (three children); Academic Challenge (A.C.) (three children), and International Baccalaureate (I.B.) (one child). Therefore, there were more programs identified than the number of children represented in this study. All the parents interviewed discussed forms of enrichment with varying degrees of satisfaction.

At school entry, all parents placed their children in regular English or French kindergartens. At the time of the study, one child was in an age appropriate regular classroom with an accelerated math and language program. Another child was in the regular classroom, with grade acceleration. Parents of both these children

stated that they picked "highly academic" Junior High schools. Two children were continuing in Academic Challenge, one child in an age appropriate placement, and one child grade accelerated prior to placement. One child was in the first year of an International Baccalaureate Program (I.B.) in High School after Academic Challenge in both Elementary and Junior High. Four of the children were male and one, female. Four were from one large urban school district and one was from a second large urban school district in the same city.

For the purpose of this study the researcher identified as a theme a subject which three of the five parents discussed. However, for the first theme, i.e., Programming, due to the limited numbers of parents with specific school placements, such as acceleration, the theme required all parents to have discussed the topic. To protect the parents' confidentiality, the researcher has used an integrated approach to the theme description. In each instance where two or more quotes appear in block format the quotes are from different parents (unless otherwise specified).

Table 1

Parent Themes

| |
|---|
| Theme 1. Programming |
| Subtheme 1: 1. Regular classroom setting. |
| Subtheme 1: 2. Academic Challenge program. |
| Subtheme 1: 3. Services to children identified as gifted. |
| Theme 2. Teacher Competency |
| Subtheme 2: 1. Teacher abilities. |
| Subtheme 2: 2. Teacher sensitivity. |
| Theme 3. Curriculum Needs |
| Subtheme 3: 1. Curriculum flexibility. |
| Subtheme 3: 2. Individual Program Plans. |
| Theme 4. Parental Involvement in Education |
| Subtheme 4: 1. Level of involvement. |
| Subtheme 4: 2. Boundaries. |
| Theme 5. Problematic Behavior |
| Subtheme 5: 1. Emotional and physical responses of children. |
| Subtheme 5: 2. Teacher-child interaction. |

Theme 1

Programming

The parent co-researchers in this study experienced the range of educational opportunities that are offered throughout the school system. Regular classroom, accelerated options, and Academic Challenge programs emerged as subthemes. Parent co-researchers also discussed a lack of support for programming for children identified as gifted.

Subtheme 1: 1. Regular classroom. There are three main points that came from parents' experiences with their children in the regular classroom. The first point was that once it was established that additional programming was required to accommodate high ability levels, the parents' reported that their children were expected to work in a independent manner in the regular classroom. When enrichment was provided for their children, the children were expected to complete the tasks with little or no assistance or instruction from teachers. One mother spoke of her child's exceptional ability to do math; however, he was unable to read. After being accelerated from grade one to grade three and after being tested in math he was permitted to accelerate to the grade five math curriculum. This was a description of her experience:

> So that happened to him, of course he was a quiet little boy and he's straight out of grade one and he's given the grade five [math] textbook and an exercise book and that was it. . . he was working straight to the grade five math which meant that the French was grade five as well. His teacher had said that he should look through the book and decide what problems he needed to do.

Another parent described a similar experience with her child's program. "And the principal ordered the high school math books for him, he's read those on his own, but there wasn't anyone working with him."

However, sometimes the parents viewed self-directed study as a positive experience. One mother described her son's reading program as independent, but also described it as suiting her son's needs very well.

> One teacher in particular, his grade four teacher, did it extremely well. She had these independent kind of projects you give, book report and stuff, she would let him take his imagination with him. . .She tended to give him a lot of independent stuff which suits [the child]. It challenges him so he churns in pieces of work that are very different from some of the other kids.

Three parents felt that the lack of teacher involvement was detrimental to their child's learning. Progress and learning were not happening for their children.

> But other than these attempts, the constant attempts by that principal to get a math consultant to come out, there was nothing. So I did not find that was very supportive and [the child] says he's never learned anything in math.

> He brought his math book home, I wrote which questions he needed to do and he did it. But then again the math, there was nothing more than just doing it for the teacher. He learned nothing that year from the math book. He just had to satisfy the teacher.

The second point, made by four of the parents interviewed, was that children identified as gifted, who were in the regular classroom, were expected to work for little praise or feedback from the classroom teacher. The parents felt that there was no celebration or joy in the child learning new information or concepts and an attitude from teachers, "Ah well, I would expect that he could do that anyway, after all he's gifted."

Another parent stated that the regular classroom teacher assigned her child homework, the child invested hours of his own time in doing the project, and the child never received any feedback. Two other parents interviewed also described similar experiences in that the teachers they encountered expected their children to work for "nothing," most often without providing praise or encouragement. The following are some examples from the interviews to illustrate the parents' support of this theme.

> . . .So there's nobody to really say you've done a good job. So I was quite unhappy with that. In the end I took over his math completely. . . .So I helped him develop a flow chart of the programs he'd written which he'd not actually done before. . . . and again [he] never heard anything back [from his teacher].

> [The child's] work hadn't been at his best, he's not trying to do his best for her, because she doesn't provide any encouragement, there's no feedback, she doesn't say "That's a good job." She doesn't mark the work very frequently and [the child] needs encouragement like everyone else. Just because he's gifted doesn't mean he'll do it for nothing. He's got to have

some payback out of it and for kids it's praise or marks and he doesn't get either.

I never felt that she really ever got the support at all from the teacher. Not only that, I didn't feel she got the support because she [teacher] wasn't correcting it [independent work], so there's nobody to really say you've done a good job.

The parents interviewed understood this could happen and expressed that they sometimes hold similar attitudes towards their children and often do not celebrate their accomplishments themselves. However, in their opinion this is inappropriate because all children require praise and encouragement. This is how one parent described it:

Maybe you don't praise them as much as you would do. . .for getting stuff right, or if it seems pretty straightforward or if they do something good. That's kind of something that they knew from way back from ages ago and they are only now covering it in school and maybe you don't make a big deal about that kind of stuff.

All parents discussed teaching to the average child. An example came from a parent who used French Immersion as a means of initially challenging his child. Difficulty came when the child was introduced to reading in the English language (the child started reading at age three); and in the opinion of the parent there was a lack of knowledge on the teacher's part, of the child's level of functioning in the classroom. In the opinion of the parents interviewed for this study, teaching to the average also meant that their children had to complete tasks that were already mastered

simply so that the teacher maintained an homogeneous group. In many instances, in these parents' experience, there were no differentiation of the curriculum for children who were gifted. Parents made the following statements; "The first problem came in grade two when they began to read in English. . .they introduced primers Dick and Jane. . .[the child] was already reading in English."

> And the principal kept trying to get that particular math teacher to give him more advanced math and at grade seven, the teacher said, "Well he's not doing the regular stuff, I know he can do it, but he's not doing it so I won't give him anything more advanced.

Three of the parents expressed empathy towards teachers and the workload they are expected to complete, lack of programming for their children was almost expected by the parents, given the stresses involved in teaching in the regular classroom. One parent described her son's classroom as having children with varying ability levels and children with academic difficulties; she stated the following:

> Sometimes we forget. . .when you are confronted by the everyday run of the classroom there is always this feeling of what the teacher could actually be expected to achieve and sometimes you feel it is hardly worth the fight.

This concern is supported and discussed in greater detail in the teacher themes.

There are various types of acceleration described in the literature. Two types were discussed by the parents interviewed for this study; the first is grade acceleration and the second, subject or curriculum acceleration. In grade acceleration a child is moved from

one grade to another, skipping a grade in between. This can be accomplished by simply allowing the child to skip a grade or, preferably, allowing the child to progress through the curriculum in a compacted manner, covering two grades in one year. Curriculum acceleration is when children remain with their age peers but are permitted to complete the curriculum for higher grades. Ideally children would be permitted to progress through the subject area curriculum at their own pace.

Three of the children of the parents in this study experienced acceleration, two with grade acceleration, and one with curriculum acceleration. The interviewed parents' perception was that children who remained in the regular classroom with acceleration experienced similar difficulties to children who were taught in the regular classroom. However, there was an added stress in that the children were thought to be "too young for grade." Many of the teachers that these parents encountered expressed opposition to the idea of acceleration, in some instances overtly and in other instances covertly. "But he's small, he's been accelerated and I get the distinct impression she doesn't approve of acceleration and doesn't feel he should be there, feels he's pushed."

Another point made by the two parents who opted for grade acceleration for their children, was they felt they were perceived as "pushy parents" and were made to feel that they were "less nurturing" towards their children for choosing acceleration as a means of challenge. One parent experienced a teacher saying: "Oh he's very bright, he's doing fine. Why do you want to push him even more."

In summary, then, it is the perception of the parents interviewed that when children were taught in the regular classroom they had difficulty with the level of teacher involvement in programming. Three parents expressed empathy for the amount of work expected of teachers; the parents interviewed also expressed distress when their children's needs were not being met and their children were not productive in the classroom. Also, it was the perception of parents in this study, who chose to accelerate their children as a way of providing them with additional challenges in school, that they were often faced with the same difficulties as for those children who are taught in the regular classroom. Additionally, the parents in this study felt that they did not have the support of the teachers they encountered for acceleration.

Subtheme 1: 2. Academic Challenge programs. The three parents who chose Academic Challenge, did so after they attempted to meet the needs of their children in their community schools through the use of French Immersion, grade acceleration, and curriculum acceleration. Overall, these three parents expressed more satisfaction with their children's programs once they decided to place their children in full time Academic Challenge. However, in the opinion of the parents interviewed for this study, the teacher was considered the most important ingredient of the program regardless of the program (this will be further explored in subtheme 2.1).

The interviewed parents expressed that teachers who have had experience in teaching children identified as gifted were often more aware of the resources and services available for these children. These three parents expressed a sense of relief when the teachers they encountered demonstrated an awareness of the types of

resources that were available; and that the parents did not have to be as vigilant in seeking out resources for their children and, as one parent stated, "reinventing the wheel."

Secondly, it was the perception of these parents that there was more of a willingness on part of the Academic Challenge teachers to provide, or obtain services to meet the needs of their children. The parents' stated their perception was, that these teachers were more likely to take the initiative and suggest or provide for the needs of their children. For example, one parent, whose child is mathematically gifted, stated, "When we talked to this teacher [Academic Challenge] one of the first things she said [was] 'Oh, he should be in Math Competitions'." This was an opportunity that the parent wanted for their child in his regular classroom placement but were unsuccessful in obtaining. This is also related to these parents' sense that they had fewer battles to fight in Academic Challenge, than when their children were in the regular classroom.

Another point made by the three parents was with regard to the perceived lack of teacher and peer acceptance when children are gifted and continue in the regular classroom. The parents stated that the teachers they encountered in Academic Challenge were more knowledgeable about developmental issues when children are identified as gifted and were more accepting of their sometimes "difficult personalities."

All three parents discussed peer relationships. Two of the three parents felt that generally there were fewer peer difficulties in Academic Challenge due to the more homogenous nature of the group. [They are not suggesting that gifted children are homogenous but rather that their intellectual performance sets them apart]. One

parent stated, "By the way, we were also convinced [to enroll in Academic Challenge] because no one likes to see his kid treated as odd. And if you happen to have a bright kid, the normal classroom doesn't operate at his level; if he already knows how to read in both languages, then he's going to get into trouble and the kids are going to tease him."

Academic Challenge programs are not offered at all of the local schools in the urban area in which this study was completed; rather, they are offered in "district sites." Often children have to move from their community schools to a district site and, at times, this transition may be difficult. While children's academic needs were met, sometimes there were other difficulties encountered by the children such as having to leave an already established peer group and joining a group that may have been together for a significant period of time. This was the situation for one mother when the switch was made at the end of grade four. The child entered grade five at an Academic Challenge site and most of the children had been together for two years. She stated, "He's being challenged more in math, he's being challenged more in science and the other subjects . . .but he's running into social problems."

Parents interviewed in this study also talked about the willingness on part of the Academic Challenge teacher to listen to them about their children's needs. Generally, the three parents who chose the Academic Challenge option felt that they were unable to talk about their children's strengths in the regular classroom; their concerns were taken lightly or not as seriously by the regular classroom teachers they encountered. Three parents expressed their satisfaction with the children/teacher matches and the teachers'

willingness to listen in the Academic Challenge setting. The following is an excerpt:

> The teacher sat down and talked to us and her strength was in the area of science and math and she ran a program in which, although she basically kept the children together, she pulled material from other sources and designed her own program. And actually she was willing to listen to us that [the child] was ahead.

The three parents also expressed the importance of the teacher/child match as well as the higher level of programming in the Academic Challenge placements. One parent was in awe at the level of understanding when he visited an Academic Challenge site. He stated "I thought 'this is great,' but I didn't believe it when I went into this class. First of all the class was very chaotic and I enjoyed that. I didn't believe that kids could understand the idea of feedback loops."

In summary, parents who put their children in an Academic Challenge program were more satisfied with their children's programming. The parents suggested that the teachers were more aware of their children's needs and were more willing to meet those needs. The parents expressed a more accepting attitude on the part of both teachers and peers. However, one parent expressed concern over her child's social difficulties when he moved to a district site, from his community school, in the late elementary years.

Subtheme 1: 3 Services to children identified as gifted. Four of the five parents interviewed for this study identified a lack of support for services for their children from their schools, even when the school was instrumental in the identification of the child's

advanced academic abilities. One parent stated that, in her opinion, schools should offer services and parents should not necessarily have to be constantly advocating for their children; if the need is present then it should be responded to in the classroom. One parent made the following statement: "And I assumed that they're educators and I sort of expected them to be offering things but it was never like that."

The interviewed parents discussed lack of support from both the classroom teachers as well as administrators when they sought services for their children After asking for services from the school administration, during the first five years of her son's schooling, one parent realized that she were getting nowhere and stated the following. "So that was all we got in grade four and . . .during grade four we realized that we had tried to work with the school and things really hadn't worked and so we looked at [Academic Challenge]" This parent also stated of the school administration, "They never said 'we can't afford it.' It was always, 'Yes, we're going to, yes we will do something'. . . and so you get strung along."

Another issue that three of the parents discussed was the lack of support they felt from the classroom teacher in bids for services for their children. The parents stated that this lack of support for something they deemed as crucial undermined the parent-teacher relationship. It was this lack of support that led these parents to seek other options such as Academic Challenge and acceleration. One parent stated the following of her child's teacher: "And he was not getting support from the teacher; we did ask for it but I never felt that we really got support from the teacher and it was at that time we realized that we needed to move him to an Academic Challenge

site." Another parent stated, "Other than constant attempts by the principal to get math consultants to come out, there was nothing. So I did not find it very supportive and [the child] says he never learned anything in math."

As well, the parents felt a distinct lack of support and accountability for their children. The parents felt there was an attitude that their children will be "OK" even if nothing was done within the classroom. The parents believed that there wasn't the same level of advocacy for their children as seen in other special needs populations. For example, one parent stated that her child's school staff recognized the need for services but her perception was that there wasn't the same level of urgency or accountability when a child was ahead as when a child was having difficulty and she stated the following: "the math consultant finally came out once in grade six. So it was a year and a half later and she only came out once - one visit." IPPs were implemented as part of the program for all children identified as gifted, however, in the opinion of these parents, had done nothing to increase the accountability for meeting the needs of their children.

Another aspect of lack of support identified by these parents was with respect to funding at the Board and Department of Education level. Parents expressed that their children were the last to be looked at in the school environment, when resources were allocated. Other services and other special needs populations were deemed to have a higher priority within the school environment. The parents recognized that it may be as a result of the limited resources allocated to education. One parent stated that a principal made the following response to questions about a teacher's

educational level and the cost of providing graduate trained teachers: ". . . Academic Challenge is constantly being challenged by those who feel that it [Academic Challenge] is giving an unfair advantage to those who need it least."

Three of the five interviewed parents stated that a lack of funding was put forth as an obstacle to providing for the needs of their children who were identified as gifted. However, these parents were willing to help teachers and were willing to take on the task of doing the "leg work" in finding the resources, however they were not encouraged to do so. The following statement supports this: "She [administrator] would say, 'no, no, no, leave it to me.' It was always, 'leave it to me.' I was excluded, there was never any encouragement for me to take any initiative and work with the school together." Another parent was told by the school principal that if her child was learning disabled it would be easier to find funding. This addresses a larger issue, lack of government funding generally: "She said, 'you can find money for children with learning disabilities but it was harder to find money for gifted children,' and she never did find anything."

All parents talked about support that they did receive as a result of either a teacher or an administrator. These things included additional work on the part of the teachers or administrators, such as setting up an advanced reading program for a child, getting a mentor to work on computer programming with a child, or hiring university students to tutor a child in math.

> They always let him take the math contests; even in grade 7 he would get out of class to take the grade 9 math contests. That's

one of the ways in which they have been supportive, but there has certainly never been anything formal.

In summary, four of the five parents in this study identified a perceived lack of support on the part of teachers, administrators, and funding decision-makers to meet the needs of their children. Parents felt that there was a lack of support for their children in some situations they encountered within the school system. The parents also discussed the issues of lack of accountability for programming for children identified as gifted, and that children identified as gifted are the last to be served and then only if there are funds remaining after all other services are provided. The parents discussed a attitude that they perceive to exist, i.e., "that gifted children will make it on their own."

Theme 2

Teacher Competency

All parents interviewed discussed specific teachers in relation to their children's programs. Parents interviewed spoke candidly about their experiences with teachers and gave both the positive and the negative aspect of their interaction. Parents spoke of their perception that the education of children identified as gifted is often tied to teacher abilities. Parents also identified teacher competencies in relation to educational programming, and in relation to personality and the match with their children.

Subtheme 2:1. Teacher abilities. All parents interviewed made both positive and negative comments about their children's education to date. Many of the positive comments were made with reference to specific teachers. "A teacher was interested," "a teacher went out of her way to help," or "a teacher provided additional

resources." All five parents commented that, at some point in their child's school career, they encountered a teacher who was supportive. The positive nature of these relationships was tied both to the teachers' programming for their children in the classroom as well as to the interaction with the parent; this included the teacher's willingness to listen to parental concerns and go the extra steps in programming for their children. Some comments are as follows:

> His teacher was very personable, she made a lot of contact with her children, and when I talked to her she would listen to me, and she always said, 'If I don't know something I'm very willing to learn.' And I found that really positive.

> But this time we looked at it again [Academic Challenge] and the teacher talked to us, no, she sat down and talked to us and her strength was in math and science . . . she was actually willing to listen to us that [the child] was ahead.

> So there were things done to encourage him and he had a very supportive teacher. . . . The teachers that see the magic and bring out this creativity. . . . Although the teachers were people he got on very well with and the teachers. . . . I don't think that they challenged him in the areas where his gift was, but they were encouraging to him and that's the thing . . . it's always one of the biggest factors in making a difference.

For three parents it was also the physical environment created by the teacher that gave them positive feelings towards the teacher and her philosophy. One parent felt very positive when there was an

agreement between parent and teacher philosophy such as the following parent stated:

> And her room was like my house, with . . . it was like an urban jungle, not in a negative sense, the place was just filled with plants and things, just things all over and divided up into little areas. I mean it was a wonderful place and it reflected quite simply the teacher's philosophy. . . . I mean it was a pretty good first experience for the kid.

All parents expressed dissatisfaction with the struggles that they have been forced into with the school system in a bid to obtain services for their children. One parent expressed her frustration as "fighting her battles from scratch" each year. This was a difficulty expressed more specifically about when her child was in the regular classroom; however parents of children in the regular classroom with grade and curriculum acceleration, as well as parents of children in Academic Challenge, expressed a lack of communication with teachers and the need to inform teachers of their children's needs each year as their children move into a new grade. "Every year [in the regular classroom] . . .this is another thing I had a problem with, that every year he moved up I felt I had to fight my battles right from scratch."

The parents also identified teacher competency as affecting the efficacy of their children's programs. In relation to competency, parents discussed the methods employed by teachers in their programming, the effort that teachers put forth in their programming, the teachers' flexibility in the use of curriculum, the appropriateness of grouping and the use of gifted children as tutors.

All the parents discussed many situations in which teachers displayed professional conduct in their interactions with parents and in programming for their children. The parents stated that they viewed positively many features including: teachers who were willing to learn in unfamiliar areas; teachers who were willing to access community resources when they were unable to program for their children; teachers who were willing to meet the challenge of teaching children beyond the specified curriculum; and teachers who were willing to develop a relationship and an interest in their child. The following are some of the parents' experiences:

> His grade four teacher would let him use his imagination. So if his book report was going to take the form of an imaginary book cover and a kind of description of characteristics. . . .She encouraged it all the time and pushed him if he didn't kind of do what he was most capable of.

> When he got there [new school] the principal set him up with one of the teachers who teaches grade nine math and that person would talk to him about "conjectures,". . . so right at the beginning he had contact and encouragement.

> His teacher was very personable, she was very good, made a lot of contact with the children. . .she always said, "If I don't know something I'm very willing to learn." I found that really positive.

While all parents expressed some positive aspects during their children's school career, all interviewed parents felt there were aspects of their children's school programming that could be

improved. The parents indicated that it is their perception that many of the teachers they have encountered have not been able to establish methods of effectively dealing with children identified as gifted within their classrooms. One parent stated, "She has not yet managed to come up with a good balance of how to deal with [the child] in her classroom, which has created some problems." Another parent stated the following: "Well it's frustrating . . . that's my overall impression. There certainly have been some [good teachers] in the last nine years, but as late as last summer [the child] said he had not learned anything in math class. . . . He has always been pretty bored in math and in nine years there should have been more opportunities."

It is the perception of the parents that many of the teachers they encountered did not have the time for the extra effort required in programming for their children. As well, parents' were hesitant to place extra demands on teachers, in some instances due to parents perceived idea that their children would somehow be treated differently. As one parent stated, "Not all teachers like to put in the extra effort it takes to do something different with your child. If you make them do something different you could have a problem with them treating your child differently. It is very difficult to balance, I find it very hard." Another parent stated,

> Teachers need to use common sense in programming for gifted children in the classroom. It does not have to be expensive, it could be as simple as allowing the children to move onto the next grade's curriculum, but it does involve extra effort.

Another related issue discussed by one parent was the teacher's demand for the parent to provide materials for her son's

enrichment. The teacher verbally stated that she was willing to provide enrichment as long as the parent provided materials. This mother stated that she was overwhelmed by this request for curriculum. She did not fell qualified to provide this and as well did not have the French language background.

Four of the five parents discussed concerns regarding the teachers they encountered having a "lock-step" attitude when it comes to curriculum. These parents stated that, when they suggested to teachers that the next grade's curriculum be used, the teachers felt that they would be impinging on their colleague's curriculum. One parent stated, "When I suggested that she be permitted to do the next grade's curriculum I was told by her teacher, 'No, because what would she do when she got into grade three,' and I suggested, 'Maybe grade four?' But, instead, she was made to do more of the same, she was bored." Another parent stated; "He was a teacher who really didn't like to have children doing anything different. He liked having all the class together."

Three of the parents discussed their children's areas of interest as being outside what would normally be considered school curriculum, for example, computer programming, geology, and science fiction. These parents felt that teachers did not capitalize on their children's areas of interest. It was the opinion of the parents that the education system in general, and teachers in particular, needed to be more flexible when it came to programming for children identified as gifted. One parent stated the following: "The child should not be held up by the fact that the teacher doesn't know much about, for example, geology. I mean, if the children are interested in rocks and minerals, let the children run with it."

Another parent discussed her son's grouping within the classroom; the teacher divided students based on reading strengths and weaknesses and had placed this parent's son in a group with the poor readers. The parent and child were unable to determine the rationale and approached the teacher. According to the parent, the child's assessed reading level in grade three was above grade seven. The parent felt that the teacher was not knowledgeable about the needs of her child and did not consider the effects of placing a child identified as gifted in a lower functioning group. The teacher's explanation was that the child was in a category all alone within the classroom and the teacher used him to help the weaker readers. The parent was unhappy with her child's role as teacher helper. This parent felt that her child had an emotional response to being placed in this group and had difficulty relating to his peers within this group. Three of the interviewed parents encountered similar experiences with their children being used as tutors. However, two of the parents felt that there was some benefits to their children, particularly with respect to self-esteem, but they saw little benefit with respect to their children's learning.

Two parents discussed teacher education as related to teacher competency. The academic background of the teacher was viewed as important. Two parents discussed the teacher's subject area strength and the match to their child's area of strength in a positive way.

In summary, the parents interviewed for this study felt that the education of their children was tied to competencies of the teacher. The parents discussed professional conduct of teachers and the extra effort required to program for their children. They discussed the curriculum, their perception that some teachers they

encountered are inflexible in the use of the curriculum and the advantages of going outside the prescribed curriculum. Parents also discussed the use of their children as tutors with children experiencing academic difficulty, and the difficulties and benefits of teachers using this as an approach to programming.

Subtheme 2: 2. Teacher sensitivity. All of the parents discussed concerns as they related to teacher sensitivity. Three of the parents spoke of their children's ability to reason and argue beyond their years and how this can "rub adults the wrong way." Three parents interviewed were concerned that teachers be able to handle their children's personalities, their constant questioning and challenging of authority. Also, all the parents interviewed felt that it was important that teachers have some personal interest or "stake" in the children they teach.

Three of the five children whose parents were interviewed were described by their parents as having the ability to "rub adults the wrong way." These parents believed that, when their children gain social maturity, this issue will become less of a problem. These parents felt that it is extremely important to have teachers that recognize this as a developmental issue and not a "major personality flaw" and are able to move beyond their personality to see their ability and creativity.

> I remember visiting my mother, and [the child] who had recently discovered sarcasm as a form of humor, he tried to use it on my mother; it was a disaster. My mother dearly loves my son but even she was unable to deal with him for about a six months, he would literally drive her "batty." He was trying on adult humor and it sounded terrible coming from a 12 year old.

Another concern discussed by four of the five parents was their children's ability to constantly question the adults in their lives, both parents and teachers. The interviewed parents stated that they have learned to adapt their parenting by the use of reasoning and explanation in dealing with their children. The interviewed parents stated that the teachers they encountered often do not provide their children with explanations for decisions; but rather decisions are often made based on "teacher authority." The parents stated that their children, because of their intellect, perceive the world differently and questioning is a normal part of everyday life. One parent stated, "I guess not all teachers are use to dealing with children that way. We thought that A.C. teachers would have a better understanding of the nature of these kids and that these kids would challenge authority."

The parents of two of the children described them as extremely sensitive. One mother described her son as constantly taking on the world's problems. She felt that it was extremely important for her son to have a teacher that is a good match to her child's level of sensitivity. She stated, "But his teacher was very abrasive and shouts and rants at the kids a fair bit, which does not suit [the child] very well. This style of interacting with the kids really puts [the child] off, he is unable to work in this environment, he's a very sensitive child." Another parent had a positive experience with her son's teacher, "Well she was the kindergarten teacher with a different background and our question was, 'Could she challenge him?' Well, she was wonderful, supportive, and he really blossomed under her."

It was the perception of the parents that it was extremely important for teachers to have an interest in their children. They believed that their children's success was dependent on the teacher and the teacher's personal interest in the children. One parent stated, "It depends so much on the teacher. A very good teacher he had in grade four managed him very well. Unfortunately the teacher became ill and had to take the last two months off school. It was then that we realized how good she had been. In her place we got a real 'ditz.' He [teacher] was there to pass the time and did not attempt to have any kind of personal interest in the children. It was a disaster. He did not have a personal stake in the kids."

One parent believed that children identified as gifted can be difficult to teach for even the most gifted teacher, and felt that teachers who themselves are gifted may be among the best matches for their children because they would have an heightened awareness due to their own experiences and needs. "So I'm not saying that there isn't incredible dedication. . .even for the good teacher, elementary teachers to teach kids they know are smarter than they are, they [kids] don't know much but they still are smarter, so that the way they 'unpack' the world, the way they perceive the world can be very different."

In summary, the parents interviewed for this study indicated that teacher competence was important in dealing with children identified as gifted. They stated that teachers need to be sensitive to the concerns which are applicable to children identified as gifted, such as developmental concern, child sensitivity, children's ability to reason, question and argue. In the opinion of these parents, teachers need to be sensitive to their own

reaction to children identified as gifted and look beyond the behavior to see the children.

Theme 3

Curriculum Needs of the Children Identified as Gifted

All parents discussed the curriculum needs of their children. In this study, the parents interviewed identified two main issues: first, the inflexibility of the school system to adapt to the curriculum needs of the children identified as gifted and, second, the efficacy of of Individual Program Plans (IPPs) for children identified as gifted.

Subtheme 3: 1. Curriculum flexibility. All parents discussed the issue of teachers having their children engaged in a curriculum that their children have already mastered. The parents stated that their children were made to complete already mastered concepts to satisfy the school system. They were assured that it was a "grade requirement" mandated by Alberta Education. The parents deemed these activities as "futile" and sometimes "destructive." One mother described her child's math program as a process, "completed only to satisfy the teacher, the child learned nothing new." In one instance a child was denied enrichment due to noncompliant behavior. The parent felt that noncompliance was due, in part, to the task requirement.

> And the principal kept trying to get that particular teacher to give him more advanced math and, at grade seven, the teacher said 'Well he's not doing the regular stuff, I know he can do it but he's not doing it so I won't give him anything more advanced.'

All parents described situations that confirmed their belief that some of the teachers encountered had no knowledge of the children's

level of functioning. One parent described a situation in which her child, then in grade two, was being taught time concepts that he had competed prior to school entry. Another parent described her experience of being informed in a parent-teacher interview that her child was being taught the numbers to 100, however, this too was previously mastered. Both of these parents described their children being able to identify what concepts they would like to learn, when asked. It was the parents' perceptions that their children had to provide concrete demonstrations of advanced ability to alert teachers to their needs. "And so she finally turned to my son and said 'well what would you like to learn?' And he said he would like to learn square roots. So she did that with him but I think that this made her think about his ability level."

> Anyway we sat down with her and she was showing us how she was extending him in math and she was very proud of what she had done with him. She's given him a board with 100 numbers on it and had left gaps for him to fill in, I mean he worked on multiplication the year before and . . . that's "peanuts."

In one instance encountered by a parent, the teacher was unwilling to accept advanced abilities. One mother described her daughter's advanced reading skills to her daughter's grade three teacher, only to be told that, maybe, the child could read the words but was unable to comprehend at the advanced level. The mother stated that that particular teacher did nothing in the regular classroom to advance the reading skills of her child.

Three parents encountered instances where they believed that they had "no voice" with their children's teachers. It was their

perception, that, as parents, their knowledge of their children's functioning was not accepted. In some instances, parents stated that their teachers would only acknowledge advanced ability after a standardized assessment. "So they took her and did a reading assessment, she was in grade three and reading above grade nine. I think then they believed me."

Another issue that four of the five parents discussed is the school curriculum, and the boundaries that are established that do not permit children to move to the next grade's curriculum. When children are gifted often they have mastered specific curriculum, either on their own through reading or through outside enrichment, however, these are not acknowledged in the school setting. Rather than allowing children to progress through the curriculum at their own pace, the parents interviewed described their children as being held back; three of the parents described situations where their children were finished their work quickly and were given more of the same or exactly the same work to complete over again. The parents described their displeasure with this "horizontal" approach used with their children in the school system. They would have liked to see their children advance their skills. This issue will also be discussed in theme five as it relates to behavioral difficulties encountered.

In summary, the five parents discussed the futility in completing work already mastered, they discussed the underlying implication as a lack of awareness on part of the teacher of their children's skill levels. They also discussed their lack of voice when it come to knowledge of their children's functioning. Parents also

discussed the horizontal approach to curriculum and the implications it has for their children.

Subtheme 3: 2. Individual Program Plans. Four of the parents discussed their experiences with Individual Program Plans (IPPs) and their perceived futility of IPPs for children identified as gifted. The process of completing the information for the school to use in the development of an IPP initially gave these parents hope that "finally something will be done" or "they recognized that [the child] has special needs." The four parents who were concerned about IPPs all discussed how their hopes were not realized. One parent made the following statement: "I mean they are expected to do an IPP. As far as I can understand now they do IPPs for the school board. . . . I don't think anyone cares about it after that." This also related to parents concerns about accountability. The parents also believed, initially, that there would be some accountability as a result of the IPP being developed for their children's individual needs, however, this did not occur in the experiences of these parents.

One parent did not discuss IPPs in the initial interview, however, in a follow-up discussion the researcher asked the parent directly if he had had any experience with IPPs. The response was one of, "IPPs are a non-issue, used to serve the bureaucracy and we learned to ignore them."

The parents stated that their input into their children's IPPs was most often ignored. Four of the parents discussed investing time and effort in providing input into their children's IPPs and felt that their input was important or "could make a difference." However, for these four parents, the input they provided was essentially ignored. One parent stated, "And actually we went through it and we wrote

quite a few changes and sent it back in and that was the last we heard." Another parent stated, "The grade three IPP we corrected and sent back and we never did get a corrected copy back. When we finally did have an interview for it, it was exactly the original one again." These parents believed, after their initial experiences with IPPs, that their input was not valued or taken seriously in the education of their children.

Another area of concern for the parents was the use of a deficit model in the development of their children's IPPs. These parents' experiences suggested that the IPPs reflected areas of weakness and not areas of strength. One parent stated, "What we saw in it was 'this child need to improve his writing, this child needs to improve this, and that,' and there was very little that actually had anything to do with his strengths. And I guess I was upset by it." When the parents discussed IPPs they were of the opinion that IPPs should be developed for their children to enable the teacher to program for their children, whose areas of special need happen to be areas of strength not weakness. The parents did not believe this was reflected in the IPPs that were developed for their children.

These four parents believed that IPPs could in fact be valuable if used appropriately. They suggested that IPPs could be used to report progress, provide goals suitable to the individual child, and be modified as the child changes, and be reported in some form to the parents. One parent stated, "There is no feedback to the child or the parent along the way, other than the report card, which relates to the standard curriculum expectations." Another parent stated, "In grade three we worked on the IPP, it had review dates in it, the review dates passed. I went to the teacher and said, 'Aren't we supposed to

review the IPP?' and we did; we sat down to look at it. She marked down a couple of things and then it disappeared into the woodwork again."

In summary, the interviewed parents felt that IPPs were developed to serve a bureaucratic purpose and that they were not used in teacher practice or to ensure accountability. The second point made was that the parental input requested by the schools was often ignored which, in turn, lead parents to believe that their input was not valuable and that they were not taken seriously in the education of their children. Another point made by the parents is that IPPs focus on the child's deficits and not their strengths. Finally, the parents believed that IPPs could be a valuable tool, however, the current practice within the school makes them "useless."

Theme 4

Parental Involvement in Education

All parents indicated that they were involved in the education of their children. These parents discussed providing additional enrichment for their children at home and in the community as well as being involved in various activities within their children's school.

Subtheme 4: 1. Parents involvement. All parents discussed the use of outside sources of enrichment for their children. The main sources were mentors, organized lessons such as music, dance and drama, university classes, and tutors with expertise in their children's interest areas. As well, these parents stated that they provided home enrichment activities, such as music, computers with programs and games, and literature.

Four of the five parents discussed feeling that their children's schools were not doing enough to educate their children. They were

unhappy with particular aspects of their children's programs and often took over parts of programming at home. Generally these parents would have liked to "see teachers adapt things so that [the child] could grow and be extended rather than doing more of the same." One mother stated, of her son's math program, "So, in the end, I just took over his math program completely. He brought home his math book, I wrote the questions he needed to do and he did it. . . As far as extension, I don't think he really got any extension." Another gave the following account, "And her reading program was pretty poor, the teacher gave her simple books that she could read in one sitting. We suggested to the school that they allow her to choose her own books to read, with no results. Finally, we brought her to the library, helped her choose books at her reading level, and sent them with her to school."

Two of the parents also discussed the use of outside resources, particularly, mentors and tutors. These were sought only after negative experiences within the school system, in attempting to meet the needs of their children. One parent stated, "So at this stage we were programming for him at home. He picked up programming in 'Basic' and also we had somebody come in that worked with him once a week and did programming with him. He really enjoyed that and it was quite challenging." Another parent stated, "So we supplied [the child] with the math textbooks, he would read them on his own. We then approached the university and asked for a professor in the math department to tutor [the child]."

Parents also discussed being involved with the school and helping out with a variety of activities. All parents discussed volunteering in their children's classroom; activities ranged from

cutting and pasting for the teacher to actually teaching portions of the curriculum. Being involved in the classroom provided all the parents with a sensitivity to the job of teacher. Parents made the following statements:

> It was her first year in the Academic Challenge program and not knowing better she got parents to teach. . . these kids, there were 20 of them, they are all selected, not bad kids but constantly in motion. They were just squirming around in their seats, but I think that's one thing that you find, it was not bored activity, rather their hands were constantly going and asking questions. . . . It began the beginning of a good relationship with this teacher and the other thing is that I realized that parents should do more of this; it gives an appreciation for how hard it is for teachers.

> I don't think that the teacher could do anything even if she promised. During that year I went in once a week to help out in the classroom. I sat with the children who were having difficulties. So I had a bit of an idea of what was going on in the classroom.

> But the thing is I didn't see that I could insist on that school actually providing anything more, unless they had pulled out all the stops and gone way beyond what normally happens in the school system, which I really thought they ought to have done.

All parents interviewed expressed a desire to work with the schools. However, four of the parents have found themselves, at

various points in their children's school careers, in a adversarial relationship with their children's teacher in attempts to get services.

> At the beginning of grade three my son had seen the math competitions in the newspaper and he really liked the idea. So, right at the beginning of the year we talked with the teacher, and I said I wanted [the child] to get a chance to do math competitions. . . . Again it was always, "yes, it's going to get done," and so you don't actually take the initiative yourself; by the time we realized it wasn't getting done, it was too late. So that was another area we thought we attacked and it's simply just so exhausting. I mean you don't want to fight, you want to work with people, but it isn't that way.

When requesting services, these parents stated that they were often told that their requests would be accommodated. The response was, "yes, I'll do," what the parent is requesting, but the verbal agreements were not followed through. Parents did not feel that they were encouraged to take the initiative and work together with the school.

Three of the parents used the term, "don't rock the boat." Parents often felt that they could not made additional demands or demand services that were deemed necessary through the child's IPP. The rationale was that these parents feared there would be repercussions for their children. Three parents discussed the feeling that making demands could cause problems for their children; however it was based on a feeling or awareness of human nature rather than a specific teacher history.

> They always said, "yes, we're going to, yes, we will." It was, "Yes, you're right, yes, we'll do something." This is why you get

strung along, you don't want to make waves when your child is involved, you're in a structure where you really don't want to "rock the boat" because you don't know what will happen to your child. Your child and your child's happiness is the most important thing to you so you get strung along.

I always have to think about what I'm doing and what will happen to [the child] if I "rock the boat" with his teachers. I don't want special treatment for him, I want him challenged. In my experience this doesn't happen unless you do make waves.

The parents indicated that they fear they are perceived as "pushy" but often feel they have little choice. Parents would like to see opportunities offered to their children rather than having to battle for everything. One parent talked about getting involved at the Board or political level in an attempt to affect change in the school system. He talked about using a top-down approach to advocating for the child. He feels that most often things need to be changed on a more global level.

In summary, it is the perception of the parents that they have to use various types of outside resources to provide their children with additional enrichment. However, some parents have felt the need to take over parts of their children's programming, although they perceive this as school responsibility. The parents indicated that they have helped in the classrooms to varying degrees and have gained an appreciation for the work teachers do within the classroom. At the same time, parents felt that they can not place demands on the classroom teacher. First, they recognized the

amount of work teachers did; second, they have a perceived fear that there could be negative repercussions for their children; and third, they did not want to be perceived by the teachers and the school system as being "pushy."

Subtheme 4: 2. Boundaries. The parents wanted involvement in the education of their children. All parents discussed the issue of parent verses teacher territory. It was the perception of the parents that there was an unstated boundary that does not permit parents to be involved in educational issues. One parent stated that she was willing to do all the leg work, drive her child to community resources when the need arose and provide the necessary support at home, but was never encouraged to participate by her child's school. Another parent who had tried to work with the school to provide suggestion on how to program for her child, stated: "We were willing to work with the school but received little encouragement to do things. We felt that there was an attitude of, 'you do your job at home and leave the schooling to the experts.'"

Another concern raised by the parents, and related to boundaries, was the parents' perception of teachers as not wanting to appear as though they are not providing an appropriate education for the children. Three parents discussed their perception that teachers do not like to admit that they can't do a particular task; they agreed to do things but were unable to fulfill all their commitments. "They don't like to be seen as being different, as screwing up. Teachers don't like to be seen as not doing their best for all children."

In summary, the parents would have liked to be valued contributors in the education of their children. It was the perception of the parents in this study that their ideas were not always

considered in the education of their children; and that there were teacher roles and parent roles, which the parents perceived can not be crossed.

Theme 5

Problematic Behaviors

The parents believed that children identified as gifted are first and foremost children, and, when they experience distressing situations in their environment, they react as do most children. Many parents expressed concern about their children's behavior. Often the behavior was in relation to what is occurring at school. This theme examines emotional and physical responses exhibited by the children of the parents interviewed and the teacher-child interactions.

Subtheme 5: 1. Emotional and physical responses of children. All parents discussed their perception, of their children's behavioral responses to school-based demands, as often dependent on the task requirement. Four parents discussed, to varying degrees, their children's withdrawal from school situations. The parents perceived that their children were withdrawing from tasks they deemed as "stupid" or "more of the same." One parent described her child as one that can easily be threatened by his teacher and one that sometimes overreacted to situations. "He reacted with withdrawal; in earlier grades he would also hide away from the teacher. Now in grade nine he will remove himself from the situation by choice."

Two of the five parents described aggressive behavior in the school environment. One parent described his child as being physically aggressive and as using foul language within the school environment. The child was physical with other children, however,

the parents were of the opinion this behavior as displaced aggression:

> I got called to the principals office. . . he's in there for slugging some other kids, I was shocked. I tried to find out why he was doing this and the circumstances were all surrounding being forced to do things he thought didn't have quality to them or didn't care to do for whatever reason.

The parent believed that due to "acceptable social standards" the child was unable to approach the teacher to let her know that he did not appreciate certain aspects of her school program. The parent stated, "So he began to exhibit displaced aggression; he obviously couldn't comment, you know, about his teacher or he'd get in trouble. So he began to have physical incidents with other kids." Another parent described an incident where her child's partner on a project was asked to leave a project due to behavioral difficulties. However, the parents questioned the task demands.

> They didn't enjoy doing it and the other boy had to leave the project completely, his behavior wasn't good enough and when I hear a child's behavior isn't good enough it most often means there is something wrong with what's happening at school. . . . It's always first the child has to improve his behavior.

Children who are aggressive get labeled as behavioral problems. One parent stated that, "The child had four years of school behind him, his grades were excellent, his behavior was positive and he managed to be in conflict with one teacher and now has a 'legacy' following him."

Only one parent discussed a child's developing physical symptoms. It is the perception of the parent that this was a direct

result of the various conflicts he experienced with his teacher throughout the school year. The child developed stomach-aches, these were investigated and the parent stated the situation resolved itself when the child moved into the next grade.

> In fact I should mention that we took him to the pediatrician because he began complaining about a gut ache. . . . And I think it is really sad when a kid begins to develop physical symptomology, especially a kid who has been identified as intelligent.

Three of the parents stated that their children expressed a desire to quit school, or did not want to return to a particular classroom. "He loved school and suddenly he wants to quit." "She informed us in grade two that she was no longer interested in going to school." "He began talking about us moving him out of his Academic Challenge classroom." The parents felt that this desire to quit school was a direct result of what was actually happening in school and the fact that the needs of their children were not being met. In one situation the parent felt that the desire to quit school was directly related to a teacher/child personality clash.

In summary, the parents discussed the concerns related to their children's behavioral difficulties identified by the school. The parents identified the demands of the tasks asked of the children to be one of the major contributing factors in the development of symptoms such as aggression, withdrawal and stomach-aches. Also, the parents identified the level of programming or lack of programming as affecting their children's desire to be in school.

Subtheme 5: 2. Teacher-child interaction. All the parents discussed their children's interaction with teachers and the effect on

their children. It was these parents' perception that this interaction can have both positive and negative consequences on the children's school year. All parents discussed experiences that they have had and, to varying degrees, personality clashes that their children have had with teachers. This topic overlaps with the theme dealing with teacher sensitivity and was further discussed there.

It was the perception of the parents that children's interaction with teachers can affect their desire to stay in school, the amount of effort they put into a task, and their self-esteem. One parent stated, "His teacher was really good with him. He was having problems in class and she made a point of praising him in front of the whole class for some extra work he had done, which helped him with self-esteem." Another parent's experience was, "We felt very much that he was a square peg and she had a round hole. He did not function well in that class and therefore she saw him as disruptive." One parent raised the concern about a personality clash between teacher and child; the parent stated, "Then this year he has a teacher with whom I feel there is a personality clash. She gives the impression that she doesn't like [the child]." Another parent raised the concern about teacher tactlessness, the parent had raised concerns that were important to her child and the teacher responded by questioning the child in public and causing the child to be embarrassed: "But when I visit and talkabout something [social concern] she will turn to him right there in the classroom. . .right in public. So how are you doing now [child] . . . and you gasp at the tactlessness of it."

It was the perception of the parents in this study that the teacher-child interaction was vitally important for the success of children in schools. The interviewed parents suggested that teachers

need to make a connection with all the children they teach and this can "set the tone" for the whole school year.

In summary, the teacher-child interaction was not the focus of this study, however, all parents discussed the issue of teacher-child interaction and its effect on their children. The interactions that these parents discussed ranged from children wanting to quit school as a result of teachers, to children increasing their self-esteem as a result of something a teacher has done. In these parents' perceptions, this was an extremely important issue for teachers; they need to have awareness of self, be able to accept children as developmentally immature, and respond appropriately to children's needs.

Summary

The interviews completed with five parents, investigating the parent-teacher relationship, resulted in the development of five separate, but, in some instances, overlapping themes. The breakdown includes, first, program-focused themes and their effectiveness in meeting the needs of children identified as gifted. The second theme raises concerns about specific characteristics of the effective teacher. The third looked at the adaptation and flexibly in programming for children identified as gifted. The last two themes that emerged raise concerns about parents' involvement in education, the perceived boundaries between parents' and teachers' roles; and the effects that effective and ineffective teaching can have on the child directly, as seen from the parent perspective.

## Chapter 5

### Teacher Themes

The following themes were derived from interviews with four teachers. The teachers were, as follows, one full-time elementary Academic Challenge teacher, one full-time junior high Academic Challenge teacher, one regular elementary classroom teacher and one regular junior high teacher.

During the initial interview the teachers were given the following instructions: "Basically you have two options. You may start at the beginning of your teaching experience and describe your experiences with parents of children identified as gifted. You may go through the years in a chronology, or you may hit on whatever you think is important to learn about. Any highlights that you think are important in terms of parent and teacher relationships are what I am primarily interested in. So you are welcome to discuss a particular child, or a particular class you have taught." The only other questions asked by the researcher were clarifying and expanding questions if some issue was vague or unclear. The questions were neutral, for example, the researcher used phrases such as, "Can you tell me more about . . .?" or "You discussed . . . can you describe what that was like?"

Each teacher was interviewed twice. Both interviews were audio-taped, and transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed thematically. The analysis of the initial interview was brought back to the teachers for verification, elaboration and modification. After this process, the individual teacher themes were compiled. Due to the diverse nature of this group, both in terms of teaching

experiences and current teaching assignment, an issue became a theme if three of the four teachers discussed it in their initial or follow-up interviews.

After completion of the analysis of the teacher themes, the researcher met with three experienced teachers and reviewed the themes with them. They offered significant input and validated many of the themes that the researcher viewed as important, and, as a result of these discussions, the themes were modified. The modification came in the organization and regrouping of the information culled from the transcripts and the naming of the themes to ensure they represented the essence of the teachers' experiences. After all themes were completed, a final comparison was made with the themes derived from a pilot study completed in 1995 (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995).

Validation was completed for this study by bringing the themes in their compiled format to one teacher, to determine if this was an accurate representation of her experience in schools. Some changes were again made to emphasize key points but content remained basically intact. The researcher believed that much insight was gained from the validating interview; the teacher co-researcher helped the researcher recognize the larger issues that the interviewed teachers were facing, with the current political climate and cuts to educational funding. The issues and concerns that were expressed were related in part to these issues and the impact on the teachers and the children they serve. Finally, while these themes are presented as separate, the present researcher felt that there was substantial overlap.

Table 2

Summary of Teacher Themes

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| Theme 1. The Process of Identification |
| Subtheme 1: 1. Issues related to identification. |
| Subtheme 1: 2. Identification process. |
| Subtheme 1: 3. Parental responses to the identification. |
| Theme 2. Funding Issues |
| Subtheme 2. 1. Insufficient resources. |
| Subtheme 2: 2. Meeting the needs. |
| Theme 3. Issues in Communication. |
| Subtheme 3: 1. Top-down approach. |
| Subtheme 3: 2. Accountability. |
| Subtheme 3: 3. Parental support. |
| Theme 4. Partnerships in Education. Who is Responsible? |
| Subtheme 4: 1. The success or failure of children. |
| Subtheme 4: 2. Partnerships in education. |
| Theme 5. The Impact on the Child |
| Subtheme 5: 1. Recognition that children are caught in the middle. |
| Subtheme 5: 2. Physical symptoms. |

Theme 1

The Process of Identification

All interviewed teachers spoke about the process of identifying children as gifted. There were four issues involved in this process, the issue of teacher identification of gifted children, the actual process employed by the school system to identify children as gifted, parental responses to identification, and the child's identification as being tied to social acceptability.

Subtheme 1: 1. Issues related to identification. The issues with identification of children as gifted were tied to school-based resources, both in terms of material and teacher time. Also, the reality for teachers in the education system was that many regular classroom teachers were faced with children who had challenging needs without, in many instances, adequate supports to meet those needs.

The two regular classroom teachers discussed their frustrations at the process of referring children for testing to be identified as gifted. The experience for these teachers was that this process brings more work because they were then responsible for the development and implementation of an Individualized Program Plan (IPP) for the referred child. These teachers' perception was that the level of funding did not provide sufficient resources to meet these needs in the regular classroom. Both regular classroom teachers stated that, when they saw children in their classrooms who may have been gifted, they suggested a district site for Academic Challenge to the students' parents. It was the perception of the teachers that they recognized their limitations and made what they

believed to be the best recommendation to the parents. This often was a great source of stress and guilt for teachers when the recognized children's needs were not being met within their classrooms. One teacher stated, "But I also let them know, I did not feel right about it, their children could be doing a lot more." These were direct statements from the transcripts to illustrate the sense of what it is like:

> There is always something more I could be doing as a teacher...after a while you burn yourself out; I've tried a lot of different things and always it is something more that is expected from me, the teacher.

One of the classroom teachers credited parents with respect because they recognized the demands placed on teachers within the classroom. This teacher stated that parents often did not attempt to get the needs of their own children met if it was at the expense of children who were struggling within the classroom, or children identified as having special needs. At the same time, teachers recognized that there were things that could have been done for children identified as gifted in the classroom, but due to limited resources and limited time they were unable to provide the services they would have liked to provide, based on the needs of the children identified as gifted. One teacher stated the following:

> I know what I would like to do with those gifted children, but when I have two "severe" ones that need definite help, I've got three that are just very, very low, and probably two with behavioral concerns, I'm seeing that I am not giving these children [gifted] the time that they need.

As a results of this knowledge, many parents of children identified as gifted did not place additional demands on teachers. One teacher stated:

> Out of the two that were funded, no, they were particularly two great parents and basically knew that it was not humanly possible for me to do that [enrich] for their children. But I also let them know that I did not feel right about it.

In summary, this indicated that the regular classroom teachers and the Academic Challenge teachers are faced with many challenging needs without adequate supports. The school system was faced with cuts to educational funding, which was having a direct impact on the level of service to the individual child. Many parents did not place additional demands on the teachers as a result of this knowledge.

Subtheme 1: 2. Identification process. Issues that three teachers in this study had, with identification, related to the teachers' perception that there was misplacement of children in challenge programs. These teachers have the perception that misplacement created difficulties for teachers, parents and children.

The teachers interviewed for this study felt that, in general, teachers were more likely to identify, and most often refer for identification, children who were self-motivated, task oriented and have positive behavior. Penney and Wilgosh (1995), in a pilot study, also found similar results and suggested that classroom teachers were less likely to refer children who exhibit behavioral difficulties or inconsistent work habits.

The method of identification currently employed by the Board of this particular School System was a "matrix system," whereby

teachers' ratings, parents' ratings and academic performance was considered. In 1997 there will be a reintroduction of the cognitive assessment as part of the testing requirement for students to be admitted for gifted programming. This cognitive part has the highest weighting at 15 points on a 30 point rating. However, the current identification procedures had some problems associated with them. An Academic Challenge teacher stated the following;

> Part of the [school board identification] is the matrix system where the parents fill out a questionnaire and that gets a certain number on the matrix. So parents who really, really want their kids to stay in the program give them all 100%'s. ...So they can skew things and if they are high achievers... it can sometimes bump them over.
>
> And then if the kid is also...a nice sweet girl and her teacher says glowing things about her on the referral and her parents say glowing things and the Canadian Test of Basic Skills is the one that's lower [the child is accepted for placement]. Some children are misplaced in Academic Challenge programs.

While the elementary Academic Challenge teacher discussed this issue, it was more apparent from the junior high teacher's perspective, particularly as it related to the relative performance of these children in the classroom, assessment by the teacher of the products they produce, and with peer relationship difficulties. "So there are a lot of benefits, I think, to a self-contained classroom, but one of the drawbacks is that we've got many kids who are misplaced. I think it is a lot harder on them [misplaced kids] in that context."

The junior high teacher described some of the behaviors other children exhibited, such as "groaning and snickering" or "rolling their eyes," when these children attempt to provide input in classroom discussions. As well, she questioned how to grade in such circumstances. Should you grade relative to the gifted children or relative to what you expect from regular children? It was a "catch 22," in that children recognized the standard and knew they had not met it, yet in some instances they got higher grades than the children who are gifted. Secondly, there was a question of how to report to parents. Parents see their children as achieving at a certain level in a Academic Challenge program, when the teacher has changed the standard. To be fair to these children, teachers compared the non-gifted, (non-funded) children, in Academic Challenge programs, with other non-gifted children in the regular classroom, for grading purposes.

It was the teachers' perception that the issue also became a parental one when, during reassessment, many parents were faced with having to make the placement decisions when their children do not re-qualify for Academic Challenge. Sometimes parents and children regarded the move to the regular classroom as a demotion. "I wish that the parents of labelled gifted kids would not see moving into the regular program as some kind of demotion, which I think many of them do." (To the credit of one of the administrators, he has not forced parents to move their children into regular programs when they did not re-qualify). One Academic Challenge teacher stated, of parents whose children no longer met the eligibility criteria:

> And then we have an interesting parent perspective come out of that because some parents were, they seemed to take it as a personal insult or affront that we would be suggesting that their children maybe weren't in the program that would best meet their needs.

Teachers in this study felt that the identification system needed to be reorganized so that these potentially embarrassing situations for children and parents could be avoided where possible, and children were in placements that best suited their academic and social needs.

In summary, the concern that the teachers discussed was with the identification system employed by their school board and the fact that there are "false positives." The result was that children struggled in the Academic Challenge placements. It was the perception of teachers that there were repercussions for peer relationships, difficulties experienced by the teacher in evaluation of the students progress, and difficulty accounting to parents.

Subtheme 1: 3. Parental responses. All the interviewed teachers described responses that they had encountered by parents, to the identification of their children as gifted. It was the teachers' perception that one of the responses they encounter from some parents was satisfaction meeting the needs of their children, and determining the best placement for their children. These parents were described by the teachers as the most desirable to work with, as they often took advantage of resources such as the Academic Challenge programs.

Another perception that teachers had was that some parents wanted their children identified as gifted. These were parents who

questioned teachers about methods of remediation so that their children qualified for programming. In some instances there was a lack of understanding, on part of the parents, of what it meant to be identified as gifted.

Some parents also responded by insisting on maintaining children in placements even when it was clear that their children's needs were not being met. These were parents who did not "rock the boat," never placed demands on the classroom teachers, and remained silent, while their children were receiving inadequate programming.

> ...But they would never go to the school system and fight them. So they just allow their children to get by, which is really sad, because they are bright, parents would like to see them do well...

> Not demanding, but in that case you wish they were more demanding. Not necessarily of me, because they know as a teacher I can not make changes. But they have to be able to rock the boat. They either go to the principal or downtown, and many do not have the time in their lives to worry about that...And yet that's the only thing that'll make the changes if those parents rock the boat.

The teachers in this study perceived the parents' need to have their children identified as gifted as being tied to "social acceptability." All the teachers interviewed for this study identified some parents had the need to have children identified as gifted so that parents and children were "socially accepted." There were two issues; first the parents viewed themselves as more valued by

having children identified as gifted (one teacher described it as a "feather in their cap"), and, second, the children were considered by the parents to be more desirable to schools because schools valued children who were academically gifted. "So rather than it being what will best meet the needs of this kid, it was what looks best to the neighbors. . .I told all my relatives that my son is gifted. . . ."

These teachers discussed the idea that somehow parents' needs and gratification were tied to their child being identified as gifted. One teacher stated the following: "But often you'll get those parents, they're so busy getting their own satisfaction and gratification, my child is bright." These teachers understood that parents were proud of their children but some parents carried it too far, in the teachers' opinion. The following are two statement from the teachers interviewed:

> I understand parents that are proud of their children, but if you stress to much, I think it goes to their [the child's] head. So the way I saw them was that they needed to have their child rewarded and identified as the best, somehow it made them [parent] better, they could brag to the other parents and neighbors, "Oh, my child won such and such a award, my child's wonderful, the school says my child's gifted, aren't I wonderful."

> If we took the label off, and just said, "my child's needs need to be met." Then you don't have the parents who are glorified [from] the child's successes. His needs are being met, not "they are gifted." I think too many parents are using that as their

medal. "My child is gifted, gee, I must be pretty smart, I did something right."

In summary, the responses of parents to the identification of their children as gifted varied. Some parents wanted their children to be "gifted" and would coach to produce a gifted child. Some parents remained passive in their approach to meeting the needs of their children. Other parents would do what was necessary to ensure that their children's needs were met. Some teachers identified the concern as being that some of the parents they encountered were living through their children. The identification of giftedness was tied to social acceptability. The teachers identified this as an issue, as it can impact on the parents' interaction with the school.

Theme 2

Funding Issues

The issue of funding was one that was outside the mandate of the classroom teachers but had a major impact on what happened within a given classroom. Funding issues in this study were discussed in general, as they related to the school programming as a whole, and the impact that funding had on children identified as gifted. These issues were discussed relative both to when parents choose to maintain their children in the regular classroom and when they choose to move their children to an Academic Challenge site.

Three of the teachers identified funding as an area of concern when attempting to program for children identified as gifted. This theme was supported both by the pilot data and by the parent themes identified in this study. There seem to be two issues, namely, insufficient resources to program for children identified as gifted, and the school system decision to designate district sites. It

was the teachers' perceptions that district sites encouraged parents to withdraw their children from their community schools in an effort to access the program they need to meet their children's needs.

Subtheme 2: 1. Insufficient resources. Three of the teachers interviewed for this study identified funding issues as an area of concern. For the regular classroom teachers, the perception was that funding was insufficient to provide enrichment in the regular classroom. Teachers in the regular classroom were faced with varying needs and, unless several children were identified as gifted within the classroom, there was often no additional funding provided to the teacher for material or staff to help program for these children. "I was probably running seven or eight (individual student) IPP's and those did not bring in enough funding to employ a full-time aide."

One teacher in an Academic Challenge classroom stated that funding was a issue when it came to gifted education, even at the "district site." She stated that administrators have the challenge of balancing their budgets which, at times, may mean placing (non-labelled) students from classes with a high population into Academic Challenge classrooms. The Academic Challenge teachers are then faced with larger class sizes and a more diverse population to serve.

> And so by running Academic Challenge classes you want to keep the class size a little bit less than the regular program because they can see that, yes, these kids want to ask questions, they want to discuss, and to have a class of 30 just doesn't allow much of that.

This teacher's perception was that the program, then, was "watered down" as a result of lack of funding to the schools to provide appropriate programming for all children.

In summary, the concerns that were related to funding, impact on all areas of programming. Teachers identified concerns as related to all areas of special needs. They have suggested that they have increased responsibility without increased support. For the regular classroom setting, it has meant that the teacher has many competing responsibilities and for the Academic Challenge teacher it has meant a larger class size and more diverse groups of students.

Subtheme 2: 2. Meeting the needs of children. "Who is responsible for programming once the students have been identified?" was a concern expressed by the interviewed teachers. Three teachers had the opinion that their school system administration looked at designated Academic Challenge sites and said, "We're [school board] doing our job, we offer this service for children identified as gifted." From the experience of these teachers, the reality was that many parents chose not to send their children to district sites, however the level of funding made it difficult to maintain these children in the regular classroom and, at the same time, address their needs.

This theme was supported by the parent theme identified earlier, and supported by the pilot study (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995). However, this theme may have been the identification of a larger issue, i.e., society's value of gifted education as a whole. One teacher discussed the issue of Alberta being a province that was relatively wealthy in comparison to many others, yet, year after year, the province has experienced cuts to the education budget which has

resulted in a reduction of services for all children. Another teacher stated that the political ideology in which we currently live, is one that espouses children as our greatest resource but continues to significantly under-fund educational programs. One teacher stated this as follows:

> And I found the money that these children get, and it's not the school's fault, some of it, but it's the "[School] System." There's not enough money that they bring in to allow having more time for them. Then it's not necessarily the system either, they have to manage the limited resources provided by the government.

In summary, the reduction in funding to education leads to a significant impact on the resources that were available to teachers to meet the needs of children in their classrooms. The teachers looked at this issue from a political level and indicated that the continued reduction in funding means a continued deterioration in services.

Theme 3

Issues in Communication

All teachers interviewed in this study stated that they actively attempt to develop and foster positive parent-teacher relationships. However, from their experiences, there are instances when parent-teacher relationships have been difficult. It was the perception of the teachers interviewed that a lack of communication may have been central to the issue.

Three subthemes were derived from interviews with the teachers. These included: (1) parents bypassing teachers and reporting directly to the teachers' superiors, either school administrators, school boards or board trustees; (2) the teachers'

perspective that they needed to be accountable; (3) the development and fostering of positive relationships between parents and teachers.

Subtheme 3: 1. Top-down approach. All teachers discussed concerns as they related to parental complaints. Three of the teachers discussed having experienced parents going directly to the administration, the school board, or to the trustees, with a complaint; rather than approaching them, as teachers, with their concerns and attempting to "work it out." An Academic Challenge teacher stated, "Within a few weeks of the start of school the parents had already gone to the administration and said my teaching is not challenging to their child, without ever saying anything to me." A regular classroom teacher stated the following:

> They don't go to the principal...the nice ones come to you and say, look you know obviously something's not being done here, what can we do? The others don't do that. They don't even go to the principal. They go to the school board, or the board of trustees.

Two teachers discussed their experience of parents collaborating and documenting their programming or lack of programming in an effort to seek the teacher's removal from their children's programs. The teachers stated that this was the exception rather than the rule, however, it made their teaching very stressful.

> . . . And they don't do it one-on-one, these are professional people, they do it as a team. They go around with little petitions, they go around behind backs, or have their coffee clubs, they often don't work or have outside jobs because they are busy being professional parents . . . they can be very, very cruel proving they know more than you.

A regular classroom teacher spoke in general terms about the level of parental pressure that she has experienced. As well, during her professional career she had seen other teachers experience similar pressures. She stated the following:

> I mean, they'll do what they have to [to ensure their children's needs are met] but when you add that kind of stress onto a teacher's life, when you look at the schools that deal with those kinds of parents, I mean, I know of three schools where teachers have literally driven out for stress reasons, they have been literally kicked out because a parent has gone for the jugular.

When asked whether this particular teacher had similar experiences, she provided an affirmative response, however she refused to discuss her particular situation on tape. She did make the following statement: "When a parent group can have a principal removed, when a parent group can have a vice-principal removed, or a curriculum coordinator take another position. . . . . they have [a lot of] power."

The interviewed teachers looked for an explanation for the parents' behavior. Generally these teachers felt that parents were dealing with one or two children who were central to their lives, whereas teachers were often responsible for 26 children in their classrooms. The teachers felt that some issue may be that parents expected the same level of teacher involvement with their children as with parental involvement. In these teachers' opinion, this level of involvement was an impossible task in the school system. They looked to find positive reasons for the responses they encounter as teachers. One teacher stated the following:

> And maybe they don't realize it, some honestly don't think they are undermining you, and they're just fighting like a mother bear for her cub, but some are actually cruel and they don't let go.

An interesting response came from two of the teachers. To illustrate, one teacher stated the following: "At first I felt threatened, I felt it was because they felt I wasn't a good teacher." The complaints made by the parents in two of these situations made the teachers examine their teaching, made them look at how they programmed for children identified as gifted. Both teachers felt that the complaints may have been the impetus for their growth as teachers. One teacher stated:

> In a way this has been a positive experience; I used to teach more to the average child in my classroom, or to the children who were experiencing academic difficulties, with the attitude that the children who are gifted would be okay. But now in my teaching, I guess I teach at different levels now. Overall, though, I have increased my expectation for all children and interestingly they have risen to this challenge. I think it has made me a better teacher and I have a better program.

In summary, these particular teachers were distressed that some parents bypassed teachers and reported to their superiors when they perceived a problem with programming. These teachers were concerned with the level of parental power and the possible repercussion to their careers. However, the parental pressure, at least for two teachers, led to positive responses. These teachers modified their teaching, their programming, and their level of

expectation to accommodate the varying levels of ability in their classrooms.

Subtheme 3: 2. Accountability. It seemed, from the interviews completed with these four teachers, that the school system was facing changes and one area in which changes have occurred was that of accountability. It was the perception of the teachers interviewed for this study that there was a danger that they may lose their teaching position, if they did not conform to the wishes of the parents of the children they teach. This was related to teachers' concerns regarding accountability. One teacher stated the following:

> That you're working together, that you're not top-down. That a teacher should not live in fear that if I don't do exactly what you say, you are going to report me. That we should be together bouncing off each other[discussing topics and issues, taking ideas from each other], [For example]; Is this OK? This works,[now] how do you see this?

Three teachers believed that they needed to defend themselves and their programming to parents. These teachers sensed that the system, for which they work, would not take a stand against any parent, that the parent was always right. These teachers believed that the school system was attempting to put forth an image to the community and as a result was losing sight of the people that delivered an extremely valuable service. For example, one teacher stated, "The school board is on a PR [public relations] campaign; principals are advertising their schools; and parents are shopping around. Parents hold the power, the School Board says that 'parents are always right'." It was the perception of the teachers that they were not supported by the system in which they worked, and,

therefore, teaching had become somewhat stressful for them. The end result was the question, "To whom are teachers accountable?"

> And, like I said, you take a large population, got money, they've got well educated parents, they have a very rich environment to learn from and they have parents who know their rights. And it has a positive side, they make sure their children's needs are met, and if they are not met, they either move the child out of the school, or they move that teacher out of that school. They have that much power.

> Part of the difficulty with teacher stress is the idea of accountability at the board level; also it's parental involvement in the school. I don't mean on field trips, it's parents who feel they have the right to tell you how to do your job. Well, how many bosses do I have to listen to? If all parents have a different opinion, how do I do my job? People are walking around trying to make everybody happy. Nobody's doing anything. Principals are in the same role.

Three of the teachers spoke about assertive parents and how the assertive parents make them feel defensive as well as the effects this had on their relationship with the parent. Also, they felt that in some instances the child gets caught in the middle, making the teacher-child relationship often a difficult one as well.

> I tried calmly to explain; he just went up one side of me and down another on the phone, yelling, screaming and carrying on, and then he says, "what's this?" you took marks off for punctuation. . . . It is interesting because he was being very

unreasonable and, well, he was going to see the principal the next morning because I was obviously incompetent.

In summary, teachers appreciated parents and teachers sharing ideas with one another and working together to approach a perceived problem. However, teachers had the perception that the school boards for which they worked were promoting the attitude that "parents were always right" in a campaign to keep students in their school system. This issue spoke to our current "consumer" society and parental "shopping around" for the best service. As a result, teachers did not feel supported by their employer.

Subtheme 3: 3. Parental support. All four teachers discussed parental support as a positive form of interaction with parents. They discussed working with parents who watched for opportunities for their children, bringing these to teachers so all benefited. They discussed the level of parental involvement in their children's education, such as parents presenting topics or lecturing in the classroom, parents making suggestions for programming, and parents volunteering within the classroom or the school. The teachers in this study had the perception that, due to the amount of power parents had, they could have an effect on what happened in the school. Teachers sometimes were unable to lobby for services whereas parents were able to do this effectively.

> There are those parents who do it to help and you're glad for them if they are doing it to help. Like, they say to you, "I know you, as a teacher you can't get the material in here, but I can certainly rock the boat to make sure it does get in here." That's nice help, that's positive, two people working together.

Another teacher discussed how parental involvement and parental recognition that a particular program was appropriate for the school affected change within the school. She stated the following:

> . . . so now our school is looking at an advanced placement idea, where kids remain in their age-appropriate Academic Challenge class; this initiative was partly a parent initiative, parents saw the need and spoke to teachers and principal about what could be done, and, as a result, the school now offers advanced placements in certain subjects.

In summary, parental advocacy could in fact work to the advantage of the teachers. There were instances where parents were able to obtain services for the classroom where the teachers had failed. Teachers indicated that they viewed, positively, advocacy that provided support for services within their classrooms.

Theme 4

Partnerships in Education. Who is Responsible?

All teachers discussed the issues of responsibility for teaching children identified as gifted. There appeared to be two issues, the issue of teacher responsibility (within the educational setting) and how parents and teachers overlapped in their responsibility for programming and meeting the needs of the children identified as gifted.

Subtheme 4: 1. Responsibility for students. All four teacher in this study discussed the subtheme of responsibilities in education. There appeared to be two issues, teacher responsibilities and child responsibilities. All teachers discussed the issue of responsibility for the success of children within their classrooms. The teachers in this

study stated that they believed that they have certain responsibility, however, they can not be responsible for all aspects of a child's life. These teachers discussed many factors that influenced the success of children's schooling, such as motivation, family circumstances, and teaching strategies. These are examples, from the transcripts, of experiences teachers have had:

> And then some of them will turn to you there in a parent-teacher interview and they'll say, "Well he was gifted right through grade six, what have you not done to maintain that? How have you turned him off learning? It's just your course, he's never had a problem with any other teacher".

> I have some parents who come to meet the teacher in September and they'll come in and they'll say, "O.K. my daughter is a gifted writer, how are you going to advance her writing career?" It's intimidating because, to me, it's then implying that the success or failure of their son or daughter is totally in my hands. And how am I going to make them a little W. O. Mitchell.

Another concern that teacher expressed was that of child responsibility. Teachers in this study believed that many parents did not give their children responsibility for their own learning. When children did not do well or made mistakes, there appeared to be repercussions to the teachers. All four teachers discussed parents who had been irate with them over a child's grade in a particular subject, or the child's progress report and the parents have "gone to bat for them." These teachers would have liked to encourage children to discuss issues with them and have children learn to take

responsibility. One teacher stated, "I don't think that parents are asking children to take responsibility for their learning. Everything is the teacher's responsibility." Another teacher stated the following:

> I had one parent phone me, irate about a book report that his son had done. I had told the class that you do not reveal the outcome of the book because then we wouldn't want to go read the book. "Leave us hanging" was the assignment...Then the father phoned me at home to rant and rave that his son had put in a lot of time and effort into that book report and why didn't he get a better mark...he went to see the principal the next morning because obviously I was incompetent.

In summary, it was the perception of teachers that they had overwhelming responsibilities for the children they teach, placed on them by parents. The teachers stated that parents placed the success or failure of their children on their shoulders, without placing much responsibility on the children or the home.

Subtheme 4: 2. Partnerships in education. All the teachers discussed the overlap of responsibility between parents and teachers. They believed that it was their job to teach the children they have in their classrooms, and it was the parents' job to "parent" and raise their children in a social world. Teachers also recognized and appreciated the many wonderful opportunities that parents provided for their children.

Two of the interviewed teachers distinguished between parent and teacher responsibilities in programming for children identified as gifted. While they believed that parents had a vital role they did not necessarily believe that parents were equal partners in the classroom. One teacher stated the following:

> You do your role at home, you have the part of raising him correctly and the rules of how to treat people. But I'll do the teaching. I know that sounds awful. You know ...parents have their role, the supporter...that sounds terrible but to be a partner we have to be on a equal basis [in knowledge, education and responsibility for teaching].

Another teacher made the following statement:

> I guess. . .we tend to do 'parents-as-partners' in education. But they're not my partner. The principal is my partner. The lady next door is my teaching partner. They're just one of the elements, they're a major part but not my partner in teaching.

This certainly related to the issues of accountability; teachers experienced stessors often as a result of the level of parental involvement. They took their role as teachers very seriously, they had a specific mandate, and attempted to work to the best of their ability.

The teachers also recognized the many opportunities that parents provided for their children and how these additional opportunities further challenged and enriched the lives of their children. One teacher stated the following:

> That's right, and then, what's always amazing to me is the other non-school things these kids are involved in. The music, the arts and we have had kids do productions at the Citadel.

In summary, teachers had a positive attitude towards parents who provided additional enrichment for their children outside the home. The teachers felt that both the home and the schools have responsibilities toward the children they parent and teach. The teachers viewed the roles as separate but of equal importance. The

teachers suggested that parents provided children with the nurturing environment necessary to live in a social world, and teachers are responsible for providing the curricula mandated by Alberta education.

Theme 5

The Impact on the Child

The teachers discussed two concerns related to the children being taught. The first was the development of physical symptoms as a result of pressures both external and internal. The second was that the children were often "caught in the middle" and this affected the vitally important teacher-child relationship.

Subtheme 5: 1. Recognition that children are caught in the middle. Two of the teachers interviewed for this study discussed children "caught in the middle" when parents and teachers were in conflict. One Academic Challenge teacher and one regular classroom teacher made the following statements.

> So, then, not only are we trying to meet the needs of the child within the classroom, but we're trying to stroke the ego of the parents of those children and not create conflicts because the kid is the one caught in the middle.

> And the parents put so much pressure on me I couldn't treat her the same way I would any other child in my classroom. As a result, we didn't really develop a close relationship like I would with any other child. The child was distant and I think it had a lot to do with the parental demands and the parental complaints about my teaching. It was a little of me and a little

of the child, I think. Maybe they talked about things in front of her, I don't know.

In summary, children get caught in the middle of the parent-teacher conflict, and this can have repercussions on children's emotional and physical well being. When the parents and teachers were divided on issues related to the school, it was easier for the child to divide and conquer. Children sometimes increased the tension between teachers and their parents, and made it more difficult for the two parties to come together in the best interest of the child.

Subtheme 5: 2. Physical symptoms. All teachers stated that children develop physical symptoms because of pressure to be successful. Teachers discussed two types of pressure, internal pressure that was child-driven, and external pressure which was parent-driven.

Parent-driven pressure was the most difficult to deal with as teachers. One teacher stated the following:

> [T]hey didn't purposely make their children stressed out, and I've seen it several times, but those children go home and Mom says, "how did you do in school today? Child responds with, "Oh I got 98 or 97 in my exam." The parent responds with, "Oh, how did you lose those three marks?" And they probably just meant it as part of conversation, or interest but so often those children rate it as, "Oh, God, It wasn't good enough."

> But where I have the problem is when the parent decides, "The class average is what?" And "oh, well, she'd better work all summer on the stuff." And I don't think that is healthy.

All four of the interviewed teachers perceived that some parents do not allow the natural development of their children. "They push too hard." This resulted, sometimes, in the development of physical symptoms.

> But so many of those children were dealing with eating disorders. Some of them, you know, would be skinny or fat. A lot of migraine headaches. And they're having ulcers at that age. That's too young to have ulcers

These teachers also recognized that children placed pressures on themselves to be successful. Sometime the expectations they had for themselves were unrealistic. Teachers, however, believed that they could teach children strategies to deal with internal pressure and how to cope. One junior high teacher stated that stress management was part of the health curriculum. One teachers stated, "And so the kid, even though he or she may have gotten 95, someone else got 97 and so they put all the pressure on themselves, that's not good enough."

In summary, the outcome of parent and teacher conflict, or teacher-parent lack of communication was, sometimes, repercussions for the children. Teachers believed that some parents did not provide a sufficiently nurturing environment for the children they teach. Parents sometimes placed too much pressure on children to succeed and did not allow for the natural development of their children.

As well, teachers distinguished between parental pressure and internal pressure to be successful. The teachers indicated that internal pressure is easier to deal with in that they can give children strategies to cope.

## Summary

In summary, the teachers interviewed for this study provided this researcher with five main themes related to parent and teacher relationships. These consisted of: the identification of children as gifted, funding, communication and accountability, partnerships in education, and, finally, the impact on the child of conflict between parents and teachers. Chapter 6 will provide a description of the overlapping concerns addressed by parents and teachers in this study. This chapter also addressed the overlap between the findings of this specific study and the overlap with the published literature.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate parent and teacher concerns when children are identified as gifted. The importance of this study was in providing information that may enable parents and teachers to gain a better understanding of the others' concerns and work towards the best interest of the children they parent and teach.

The research study investigated two areas, parents' and teachers' perspectives of the relationship between parents and teachers when children are gifted. This study was completed first by reviewing the literature on families of children identified as gifted, and families of children in other populations of special needs. The researcher reviewed the literature on identification of children as gifted and on parent-teacher relationships. To begin the data gathering the researcher completed a pilot study, in which one parent and one teacher were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The methods of analysis used were from the qualitative paradigm (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995).

A larger study was then completed; four teachers and five parents, who met the criteria as outlined in the methodology, were interviewed. Each parent and each teacher were interviewed twice, and the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. All interviews in this larger study followed an open-ended interview format, which was a change from the semi-structured interview format used in the pilot study. The researcher was concerned that the themes that emerged from the pilot study may have been influenced by the imposed structure of the interview in the pilot study. The researcher believed in the importance of allowing

the co-researchers the opportunity to tell their stories and experiences. Finally, one teacher and one parent from the original sample were interviewed (without audiotaping) as validating interviews.

The results of this larger study indicated five parent themes, including two themes regarding programming, one reflecting teacher competencies, one theme regarding parental involvement in the education of their children, and a final theme which looked at the impact on their children when there was conflict between parents and teachers. There were also five themes that emerged from the teacher data. They included identification procedures, funding issues, communication between parents and teachers, responsibilities in education, and a final theme regarding the impact on the children.

Table 3 is an outline of the overlap of the themes; it combines the common parent and teacher issues. The theme structure was completed by reviewing all theme and subthemes of both groups and identifying areas which overlapped significantly.

Table 3

Summary of Parent and Teacher Theme Overlap

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|---|
| Theme 1. Funding Issues |
| Subtheme 1: 1. Programming. |
| Subtheme 1: 2. Lack of support. |
| Theme 2. Meeting the Needs of Children Identified as Gifted |
| Subtheme 2: 1. Curriculum needs. |
| Subtheme 2: 2. Accountability. |
| Theme 3. Communication |
| Subtheme 3: 1. Relationships. |
| Subtheme 3: 2. Boundaries. |
| Theme 4. Impact on the Child |
| Subtheme 4: 1. Physical/emotional response. |
| Subtheme 4: 2. Teacher/parent/child interactions. |

Discussion of Overlap Between Parent and Teacher Themes:

Theme 1. Funding Issues

The first issue that overlapped was funding. Both parents and teachers identified the impact that lack of funding created in attempting to provide services for children identified as gifted. Generally this issue was believed by the teachers to be a more global issue than gifted funding, in that funding was a problem for almost all populations of special needs children. Teachers were generally being asked to provide services to more children with more diverse needs, and with less educational and government funding.

Parents believed, and teachers supported, the issue that children identified as gifted were "at the bottom" in the allocations of the sought-after funds and were the last to be served. Parents identified a lack of support at three levels, i.e., board, administration of the schools, and teachers. However, the teachers addressed this theme at a more global level; the issue of politics. They suggested that the lack of support came from the government's cuts to spending in education which, in turn, filtered down to impact on specific programs and children.

Subtheme 1:1. Programming. The effects of lack of funding appeared to be most severe in particular programs, specifically in the regular classroom setting, where teachers were required to program for many children with special needs, without adequate support. The Academic Challenge programs were not insulated from the effect of schools having to balance their budget;, the teachers identified the concerns of increasing class sizes and placement of non-identified children into their programs.

The regular classroom teachers reported, and the parents supported, the concern that their classrooms were made up of children with extremely diverse needs. The children who were identified with learning difficulties were generally first to be serviced within the regular classroom. The repercussions for children identified as gifted were that they are often left to complete work independently, in the classroom. As well, as they did not receive feedback on their completed work.

Subtheme 1:2. Lack of support. Parents identified, and teachers supported, the subtheme of lack of support for children identified as gifted. Both the parents and teachers recognized that these children were not provided adequate funding, and teachers felt the school boards absolved themselves of their responsibility when they provided "district sites" that served children identified as gifted. (Not all parents of identified gifted children are able to place their children in district sites, it required additional responsibilities and expenditures particularly related to transportation. The funding was not sufficient to provide any additional resources in the regular classroom.) The implication was that Academic Challenge programs created a service that was accessible only to those people who were able to absorb the increased costs in educating their children, thereby, providing for a more "elite" class. Lower socio-economic families with children identified as gifted may not be able to access such services.

This particular subtheme, lack of support, was also supported by the pilot data (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995). An issue described in that study indicated that lack of support may have also been a reflection of societal attitudes that "there is a perceived notion within

the schools that somehow this program [Academic Challenge] is taking money away from the regular program" (p.6).

Theme 2. Meeting the Needs of Children Identified as Gifted

The second theme that was supported by both parents and teachers, was the theme, Meeting the Needs of Children Identified as Gifted. The parents in the present study identified, and the teachers supported, the issue of Academic Challenge programs as being able to more adequately meet the needs of children identified as gifted. Several concerns, including the Academic Challenge teachers' increased awareness of the needs of the gifted child, the sensitivity to children identified as gifted, more challenging demands placed on the children by the programming, and the knowledge and ability to access outside resources in meeting the needs of children identified as gifted, were identified by parents as important in meeting the needs of their children. This theme did not emerge from the parent or teacher pilot data. However, the pilot teacher data did support the concern that the regular classroom did not always meet the needs of children identified as gifted. The pilot data teacher-theme, Programming and it's Impact on the Gifted Child, does support this theme. "According to the teacher, some schools offer no programming, but rather the program is dependent on volunteers and student teachers and therefore unstable" (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995, p. 8).

Subtheme 2: 1. Curriculum needs. Parents identified, and teachers supported, the concern that teachers were inflexible in changing the curriculum to meet the needs of children identified as gifted and that children were made to complete a curriculum of skills and knowledge that they had already mastered to meet Alberta

Education requirements. The parents and the teachers were opposed in this issue. The parents were of the opinion that their children should not have to waste time doing concepts they have previously mastered. However, the teachers stated that these are curriculum requirements and are mandated, children are required to complete the specified curriculum for their current grade. Teachers believed that parents, who want change, should lobby Alberta Education, not the individual teachers.

Subtheme 2: 2. Accountability. Parents and teachers both identified the issue of accountability. Parents felt that there was not the same level of accountability for teaching children identified as gifted, as with other special needs populations. Parents believed that IPPs developed for their children were useless, and were only developed to serve the bureaucracy, as well as being developed from a deficit model. The pilot parent data supported this theme, both in the futility of the IPP and the use of a deficit model in their development.

This issue did not emerge as a teacher theme but the issue was mentioned by two teachers. One teacher stated, "IPPs take hours to write and most often are used to serve the bureaucracy. Of course I would never say that to my principal. Most teachers feel they [IPPs] are not worth the paper they are printed on."

Accountability was also an issue that was discussed by teachers with respect to the transition toward having parents as partners in education. Teachers believed that the increased power of parents make teachers accountable to not only to parents, but also administrators, School Boards and Trustees. The teachers were stressed and found it difficult to determine to whom they were

accountable, and what philosophy they should follow. Teachers felt stressed due to their perception that parents have power to have them removed from their positions.

Theme 3. Communication

The theme of communication was one that teachers discussed and parents supported. Teachers identified the importance of fostering positive parent-teacher relationships. The teachers indicated that this fostering of communication could only help to make a more positive working environment. Teachers stressed the need to have parental support, and that this can be particularly helpful if parents were using their energy to "rock the boat" to gain services for the children.

Some of the positive communications that teachers discussed were incidents where parents approached and attempted to work out a problem with them prior to going to the teachers' superiors. The teachers suggested, and the parent supported, the fostering of parent-teacher relationships through parents volunteering in the classroom. This gave teachers the much needed support to carry out their program and gave parents an understanding of what goes on within the classroom. The parents expressed empathy towards the workload of teachers they encountered after spending time in the classroom, where they did a range of activities from manual labor tasks to teaching a unit of studies.

Subtheme 3: 1. Relationships. Parents also discussed the issue of communication and positive parent-teacher relationships. Parents stated that they valued teachers who involve them, who go out of their way to provide for the needs of their children, are willing to listen to their concerns and put in the extra effort required to meet

the needs of their children. Parents valued teachers who are willing to let them be involved in substantive issues and ones who respect them as individuals. The pilot parent's themes, The Importance of Mutual Sharing of Information, and Barriers to Effective Parent-Teacher Relationships, supported this theme. The support was implicit. The parent discussed the barriers to parent-teacher relationships as "not meeting the needs of the child, lack of exchange of information, teacher defensiveness, and complaints" (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995, p. 7).

Subtheme 3: 2. Boundaries. Parents also discussed boundary issues, and the teachers supported this subtheme. The parents suggested that teachers had artificial boundaries that prevented them from being involved. However, for the teachers, the boundaries were seen as a protection from their perception that parents had the power to have them dismissed from their positions. The teachers wanted to have the support and the backing of their administration and their school board, however, they felt that their board operated on the basis that "parents are always right." The issue was a sensitive one, and the implication, for the school system, was that they needed to do something that provided parents and teachers with firm guidelines on their respective roles and responsibilities.

A difficulty was that it appeared that parents and teachers were moving further apart, i.e., communicating less. These parents have suggested that teachers gave them "lip service" in the education of their children, and teachers suggested that parents are not equal partners in education.

Theme 4. Impact on the Child

The impact on the child was a theme that emerged form both the teachers and the parent data. Both groups discussed the implication for the children whose education was the focus of these interviews.

Subtheme 4: 1. Physical/emotional responses. Parents identified, and the teachers supported, the subtheme of children's emotional responses to the educational setting, placement and curriculum. Parents and teachers took two different perspectives in this theme, in that the parents believed that the responses of withdrawal, aggression, and other behavioral difficulties are a result of what occurs at school. Teachers, on the other hand, identified the emotional responses as being a result of either parental pressure placed on the children, or a result of internal (child) pressure. The parent felt that the teachers did not necessarily see that not meeting their needs in schools has impacted on the children.

The parents raised, and the teachers supported, the issue that teachers perceived some parents as "pushy." This attitude is also supported by the pilot teacher data (Penney & Wilgosh, 1995).

Subtheme 4: 2. Teacher/parent/child interaction. Teachers and parents, additionally, identified the idea that their children were caught in the middle. Teachers felt that, when parents and teachers were in conflict, this spilled-over to the child and the relationship with the whole school. Parents felt that their children's needs were not met and that, in order to meet these, they had to "rock the boat." They feared repercussion for their children or for other children they have within that school. It was significant that both parents and

teachers see the child as central to what happens in schools. Both groups recognized that they were not at opposing ends, they need to come together and discuss their fears, and approach the needs of the child as a united front.

Relation to Previous Research

The major findings, that were reported in this study, have support in the available literature on parenting children from other special needs populations, the available literature on parent-teacher relationships generally, and the literature on families of children identified as gifted. There was a limited literature investigating parent-teacher relationships when children are gifted; the support for the teacher themes came primarily from the literature available in the area of parent-teacher relationships.

Enerson (1993) completed a doctoral study using phenomenological methodology; she interviewed 10 parents and five teachers of children identified as gifted regarding their interactions with each other. The study additionally completed an educational program using workshops for the parents and the teachers. The results were summarized as follows:

(1) parents of gifted children need information,
(2) parental beliefs engender conflict,
(3) teacher beliefs engender conflict,
and (4) parent education is an effective way to improve interactions among parents of gifted children and educators. (p. 3377)

The Enerson (1993) results appear to overlap with the results of the current study in two areas, namely parental beliefs engender conflict and teacher beliefs engender conflict. It is important to note that parents and teachers from another country (United States), in a

study conducted at Purdue University, demonstrate a fair degree of overlap.

The first theme, the issue of funding, was one that was political in nature and should be looked at from three levels, for example, government, school board, and school. One just needed to listen to the rhetoric of the latest federal election to recognize that education had been hit hard by government funding policies. Educators were expected to do "more with less." The parents expressed concern that there seems to be a societal attitude that gifted education provided services to "children who require it the least" and a prevailing attitude that, "they will make it anyway" (Gallagher, 1988, p. 54). Mathew (1981) stated, "Few professional educators will deny that the maintenance of special education for children identified as gifted depends on the attitudes in the lay public" (p. 207). Colangelo (1988) also stated that society may have a misperception that the gifted child may get "something for nothing."

Russo, Harris, and Ford (1996) reviewed the recent court ruling, Broadley versus the Board of Education for the city of Meridien, in which the Supreme Court of Connecticut ruled against the parents' right to specialized education for their gifted child. This article addressed two issues that supported the findings of this research: first, the funding of programs and services for children identified as gifted was precarious. Second, there were no mechanisms in place to evaluate programs for children identified as gifted and, therefore, mediocre programs continued, without consideration for the effects on the children in these programs. This related to, and gave supports to, the parents' contention that there

was no accountability for meeting the needs of children identified as gifted.

The issue of funding was identified as a theme and has implications for programming for children identified as gifted, as well as for other special needs populations, including children with severe disabilities (Adams, 1987); adolescent children with autism, (Fong, 1992); children with visual impairments (Hancock, 1988); and children with learning disabilities (Waggoner, 1988). All of the above studies indicated funding was an issue for educational systems in attempting to provide for services for children with disabilities.

Daniel (1991), in her qualitative study investigating "What it means to be a teacher," supported the concerns of the teachers that they have to provide for the needs of all children without the necessary support; "They are expected to do more with less. Today teaching is more stressful than it use to be. There is more required with less support" (p. 97).

Parents and teachers discussed the roles and responsibilities involved in meeting the needs of the children identified as gifted. A theme emerged related to provision of services to children identified as gifted outside the school system. This issue also emerged as a theme in other studies on parenting. Waggoner (1988), for example, studied parenting children identified as learning disabled; parents expressed having to meet the needs of their children at home, and having to take over where the school left off in providing remedial services for their children. This was not dissimilar to the experiences of parents with mathematical or language gifted children, having to provide university tutors to enable their children to learn, develop,

and grow. The question was, who was responsible for ensuring that the needs of children are met?

Attempting to determine the most appropriate placement for their children, was a theme discussed by the parents of children identified as gifted. Each of the placements available to parents had unique characteristics, and some were more appropriate in meeting the children's needs than were others. Chinchilla (1994), in an article on inclusive education for children identified as gifted, identified similar issues to those discussed by the parents in this study; for example, children in the regular classroom setting being made to complete already-mastered curricula, children being made to work independently, and lack of instruction. Fong (1992) also stated, "One of the main concerns for all parents in this study was finding appropriate educational programs that met the needs of their adolescents with autism" (p. 140).

The teachers in the present study also expressed frustration related to their not being able to meet the needs of all children in their classrooms. Teachers wanted to do the best that they can for children, however, the demands placed on them often did not permit them to do so. The teachers recognized the need, had specific suggestions and ideas that could be used in programming, but lacked resources, both in terms of finances and time commitment. Daniel (1991) also supported this theme in her interviews with teachers in the study of "teaching." Teachers in her study also expressed the issue of demands competing for their time and energy.

However, meeting the needs of children has resulted in many instances of parents entering into adversarial relationships with the school system. Vestal (1993) supported this concern, stating, "Many

parents, at one time or another, are faced with a school situation that does not serve the needs of their gifted child" ( p. 8). Waggoner (1988) also stated, "The majority of the advocating types of statements made by these parents throughout the interviews suggest a certain level of frustration with school and school board personnel. While there were exceptions, many of the parents described their advocating experiences with words like battle, fight, anger, and frustration" (p.50).

Another issue, that of accountability was raised by both parents and teachers. Parents expressed concern that there was little accountability in meeting the needs of their children. Parents have to be vigilant in their effort to have their children's needs met. This theme was also expressed in studies on children with disabilities (e.g., Adams, 1987; Hancock, 1988; Waggoner, 1988).

The second aspect of accountability related to teachers' accountability for their programs. The teachers expressed frustration related to accountability and parental involvement as they did not feel supported by their employer on how to deal with these issues. This issue was also supported by Gareau and Sawatzky (1995), in the statement: "It appears that school personnel experience feelings of vulnerability related to potential loss of some of their professionalism. As long as school personnel relate the role of professionalism to that of expert they will continue to experience difficulties in interaction and giving parents more than lip service" (p. 465).

Teachers in this study indicated that they understood the need to develop and foster parent-teacher relationships, because doing so often meant that the best interests of children were served. Parents,

also, indicated a desire to foster positive relationships with teachers. Both teachers and parents suggested that this sometimes was difficult. For parents, they felt that their opinion and information they have concerning their children were not often valued. The teachers believed some parents were demanding, and did not allow for the natural development of their children; and some of the teachers felt strongly that parents were not equal partners.

The parent issue was supported in the literature. Waggoner (1988), in her study on parenting learning disabled students, discussed the theme of the "Invalidated Parent" in which she discussed the same issue as for parents of children identified as gifted. She stated that, "Parents experience frustration at not being heard" (p. 64).

Grainger's (1984) study, of parents' involvement in school decision-making, found that most parents believed that their role in schools was largely one of service and support. This was supportive of the information found in the current study. Grainger, also, found that principals and teachers were unanimous in their opposition to any form of shared decision-making as related to curriculum and instruction. Teachers in Grainger's study reported that parental opinions were not sought regularly, and, if they were, it was regarding concerns educators believed were less important. This is supportive of the parent and teacher perspective in the current study. Bratlinger (1991) also supported parents' feelings that they are not heard, in his statement: "Parents as partners has been called rhetoric and window dressing because parent involvement is more ritualistic than substantive and the real opinions of parents are undervalued and ignored" (p. 250). Gareau & Sawatzky (1995) also

stated that parents felt powerless when they interacted with school personnel.

Scorgie (1996), obtained similar findings in her study on parents of children with disabilities. The parents felt that they had no voice and were not valued in the professional community: "Parents strongly feel that, because they know their child best, they are the most qualified to determine what he/she needs. Professionals might find that affirmation of parents and the knowledge and abilities they possess facilitates more constructive collaboration" (p. 200).

The parents interviewed in this study stated that they valued teachers who were willing to listen, and willing to act in an effort to meet the needs of their children. The suggestion for teachers, then, was as Scorgie (1996) stated: "Parents value professionals who collaborate with them as members of a team, rather than those whose goal is to train them from a position of authority" (p. 200).

Teachers, however, were being asked to change their practice to include parents, bringing with it some loss of their perceived professionalism (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). The boundaries that teachers were currently putting in place may be, in fact, a reaction to change, and, in systems-theory language, a means to maintain homeostasis. ". . . Schools have not provided direction for participation: when such direction has been provided, it has not been specific enough to be fruitful" (Colangelo & Dettmann, 1983, p. 25).

The teachers suggested school boards were carrying out a "public relations" campaign and, as a result, "parents are always right." Teachers are afraid for their jobs, as parents move into positions of power. Daniel (1991) also discussed the issue of public

relations in her dissertation, and corroborated the issue identified by the teachers, "Everyone is selling their schools" (p. 98).

Parents and teachers both recognized the impact on the child when they are in conflict. In the current study, the parents often placed blame on the school when their children misbehaved, and the teachers suggested the parents "putting too much pressure on the child" as the cause for behavioral difficulties. In family-systems theory, dysfunctional interactions in the family result in dysfunctional behavior. We can apply systems theory to the two main institutions that exist in a child's life and recognize that children's behavior is a function of dysfunctional patterns of interactions (Friedman & Gallagher, 1991). Parents of children with learning disabilities also identified behavioral and emotional concerns as a result of the children's school experience (Waggoner, 1988).

From a systems theory perspective, when families and schools stop working together the result can be dysfunctional communication. McVicar (1995) suggested that when parents and teachers stop working together they each blame the other, however, it rarely is one or the other that was at fault but rather the interaction or "dance" breakdowns. She suggested seven scenarios which the present researcher has paraphrased; they were as follows:

1. Parents present as anxious and over-demanding, the school personnel withdraw or react with frustration or anger. The result was that parents develop an antagonism towards the school.

2. Parents or child split(s) up the team through miscommunication, the school personnel react with frustration and defensiveness and spend unnecessary time trying to clarify what

happened and who should deal with it. A lack of trust develops so that valid issues are not addressed by either the home or the school.

3. School team members are in dissension, with a lack of agreement about what should be done. The parents receive conflicting messages. Parents develop a lack of trust and seek outside resources. The student pick up the uncertainty and react negatively.

4. Child sets up rejection from the team by not following through on assignments, etc. The school personnel withdraw as they feel they have tried to work with the child. The school system becomes punitive and rejecting.

5. The parents are insecure and placate the school but do not cooperate. The school is surprised and blames the parents. Parents are then blamed as unsupportive and inconsistent in follow-through.

6. Parents are not trusted by the school; they may have been regarded as overassertive. School personnel are insecure in dealing with them and the child. The result is a breakdown in trust on both sides.

7. School team and parents are overwhelmed and both withdraw due to discouragement. Goals for the child may decrease and the child may receive a mixed message regarding his/her value at school and about behavioral expectations. These occur within the general population and could possibly apply to situations where children identified as gifted are involved.

Robinson and Noble (1991) stated that children identified as gifted generally have better than average social and psychological development. Moon, Kelly, and Feldhusen (1997) also stated that they found gifted children to have better than average psycho-social development. However, due to their gifted characteristics, they

appear to be more vulnerable to difficulties in social and emotional spheres. Their characteristics can bring them into conflict "especially when family and school conditions are not optional" (p. 19). Gareau (1994), in her research on collaboration in schools, also found supporting evidence for this view. "Sharing of knowledge of the child's experiences at home and at school would help both the teacher and the parents in their respective roles as facilitators of the child's education" (p. 136).

In summary, the results of the present study were validated through the research literature reviewed by the present researcher. There was sufficient support in the literature, the media, and through the Alberta Teacher Association, which respect to the issues surrounding funding, to validate this theme identified by both teacher and parents. The second theme, Meeting the needs has significant support in the literature, however, IPPs and gifted have little or no research literature available to support or refute the parents contention that the IPPs for children who were gifted are inappropriate. The theme of Communication have significant support in the literature. Several studies outlined the importance and the significant impact of open communication. The impact of parent and teacher conflict on the child also was supported in the literature. One area that the teachers identified as an issue of concern related to identification. Teachers felt that children, who no longer meet the eligibility criteria outlined by their School Board, have difficulty in gifted programming. There was evidence in the literature that, where a more liberal definition of giftedness, such as the one outlined by Renzulli (1978), was used children have been successful in gifted programming. The issue then may be more related to the

increased demands placed on the teacher, however it would require further study.

Implications of the study

Implications will be discussed under three headings: (1) implications for professionals, (2) implication for parents, and (3) implications for further study.

Implications for professionals. In 1994 the Alberta government developed a plan to restructure education: Meeting the Challenge: Three Year Business Plan. One of the main goals of this document was to increase parental involvement in education. A second goal involved enabling parents and teachers to have meaningful roles in decisions about policies, programs, budgets and activities. In order for these goals to be realized, it is essential that we gain an understanding of parent-teacher relationships.

1. One of the implications for practice that comes from this study, and the review of the studies in other special needs populations, is that all special needs groups want teachers to be educated in the particular area of special needs. Current and preservice teachers need to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of all children in their classroom.

2. Teachers need to recognize that, when faced with a child with a specific "disability" or "gift," they are responsible for that child's education. They should familiarize themselves, through education and self-learning, with the characteristic and specific strategies to best work with that child.

3. It is essential that preservice teachers as well as teachers currently working in the field, gain expertise in working with

families of all children. "If teachers are to become more active in family support, pre-service programs must be modified and in-service instruction provided so that they become more knowledgeable about family dynamics, communication techniques, conferencing skills, legal issues, the nature of handicapping conditions and services provided by agencies other than schools" (Brantlinger, 1991, p. 78).

4. Another implication for teachers is that they need to be proactive in their involvement of parents in the education of their children. This would serve two purposes: first it would make parents feel involved as important members of the "team" and second, the involvement could reduce some of the perceived fears that teachers have concerning parents' involvement.

5. An important point that came out of the present study, is that teachers perceived a lack support from their superiors. To effect change in how parents are involved with the schools, teachers need to be able to take "risk." Teachers are often uncomfortable with parental involvement in areas they deem to be their domain. However, if teachers are not supported and they "live in fear" of parents, then from a systems theory perspective teachers will close off communication further, having the opposite effect to what the current government is advocating.

6. It is important that parents and teachers form a united front in meeting the needs for children identified as gifted. These parents and the teachers were somewhat opposed in their valuing of parental involvement in education. It is the responsibility of the school system to develop and implement strategies and provide leadership to ensure parents and teachers can work together. The

development of firm strategies to ensure that parents and teachers work together in the best interest of the child could possibly help to avoid some of the behavioral and emotional difficulties experienced.

Implication for parents. An implication for parents is that they need to recognize that teachers are human and have the same responses, e.g., defensiveness, when they are threatened. The teachers in this study have suggested that they appreciate when issues are discussed directly with them. Teachers are interested in the education of the children that they teach, however, the "top down" approach of complaining to superiors prior to approaching the teachers with an issue creates feelings of defensiveness among teachers. The style of interaction that parents use with teachers can greatly affect their parent-teacher relationship.

Parents needed to be aware of the stressors involved in education within the classroom and that the current funding levels impact this stress. Parental advocacy could be used to assist the teachers involved in educating their children. For example, the teachers stated that parents can get resources that they are unable to secure by advocating through the School Board, Trustees and Administration.

Communication had been identified in this study and others as an important criterion for successful parent-teachers relationships. While teachers have to be responsible for some communication it is important for parents that they keep lines of communication open and that they allow teachers to have a "voice."

Conclusion

The question then is, "How can parents and teachers foster positive working relationships that will enable them to work in the

best interest of children?" This study has identified areas that continue to cause difficulty for both parents and teachers. Working on these problem areas can benefit both parents and teachers. However, it is this researcher's belief that schools (boards, administrators and teachers) need to take the leadership role in continuing to foster parent and teacher relationships.

One of the key components that was identified in this study is effective communication. Parents and teachers need to develop a more open communication style. From a teacher's perspective this style of communication is less likely to occur when there is a perceived threat. Boards need to provide current teachers with the necessary skills and support to involve parents, and university training institutions need to ensure pre-service teachers are skilled in interactions and communication with parents.

Effective communication patterns would also be an asset with respect to lessening the likelihood of patterns of problem behavior, such as those identified by McVicar (1995), would develop. Children can be masterful in manipulation of the home and school and successfully play one off against the other. These patterns can quickly be de-escalated when there is an open and continued communication pattern between parents and teachers.

Another means of improving parent-teacher relationships is to address the issue of expectations of schools in the education of children identified as gifted. Parents and teachers need to come together and identify realistic expectations of the school and education in general. Parents and teachers want "the best" for their children, however, teachers have to work with the available resources. It is this researcher's belief that the vehicle for setting

realistic expectations is already in place within IPPs. IPPs are mandated for children identified as gifted, however often they are not used in a beneficial manner. Parents and teachers need to learn to use IPPs to ensure that the educational needs of children identified as gifted are met.

Finally, schools and teacher education institutions need to take on a leadership role to ensure that teachers and parents understand the issues and concerns related to children who are gifted. School can serve as educators to parents, community and society in the issues and concerns related to children identified as gifted.

Questions for further study

Undertaking research in the area of parent and teacher relationships when children were identified as gifted, has led the present researcher to more questions than answers.

1. This study was limited by the educational, cultural and economic level of the parents involved. It would be important to compare the results of this study with parental expectations for children identified as gifted in lower socio-economic and culturally diverse groups; parent-teacher relationships in lower socio-economic and culturally diverse groups; and the level of advocacy in lower S.E.S. and culturally different groups.

2. Another area for further research would be to examine, more closely, differences in expectations when children are identified as scientifically and mathematically gifted as compared to giftedness in other areas such as language arts/reading. It would be important to investigate further the experiences that parents, who have children who are scientifically and mathematically gifted, have in attempting to meet their children's needs within the school setting.

3. Another implication for further study is the need to look at the usefulness of the "deficit model" in Individual Program Planning for gifted children. Parents indicated the futility of IPPs, therefore, it would be appropriate to further investigate IPPs to determine their usefulness, and to attempt to identify how they can be used to the benefit of teachers, children, and schools.

5. Further studies are required that look at parental versus teacher expectations for children identified as gifted, for example, to examine how expectations can affect parent-teacher relationships and ultimately, the outcomes for the children.

6. Further studies are required to examine the impact that school and family conflict has on the performance of children identified as gifted. There is a need to investigate further social and emotional difficulties that children experience and procedures for intervention.

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Appendix A

Parent and Teacher Letter

Study title: A qualitative investigation of parent/teacher relationships when there is a gifted child.

Investigator: Sharon Penney

Department of Educational Psychology

University of Alberta

As part of the requirements for the completion of a doctoral program I am conducting a research study which will investigate parents' and teachers' perspectives on the relationship between parents and teachers.

Your participation in the study is requested. All information for the study will be audio-taped and will be gathered during two interviews of approximately one hour each. The first interview will deal with specific topics outlined above, the second interview will give you, the participant, the opportunity to expand or clarify any information presented in the first interview or to add any additional information. All information will be treated as confidential; the names of the participants, as well as any other identifying information will be eliminated from the data. The audio tapes will be held in a secured location and access to the tapes and data will be limited to the researcher and co-researcher.

You will have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time without prejudice, if you do not wish to continue, by advising the researcher you wish to withdraw. Your data would then be destroyed or returned to you at your request.

Consent to be interviewed

Your signature below will indicate that you agree to participant in the above named study.

I, _____ (print name), give permission to be interviewed and for the interviews to be taped recorded. I give permission for the investigator to transcribe the interviews to paper format. The paper format will be coded so that all identifying information is excluded. This researcher and the research supervisor will be the only persons with access to the data. I understand that the tapes will be erased at the completion of the research project and that no data will be associated with any participant. I understand that the research findings may be published, and that these results will be available to me, at my request. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions and am free to withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

_____ _____

Parent or Teacher signature Date

_____ _____

Witness Date

Appendix B

Demographic Information (Teachers)

Code Number_____ Date_____

1) Do you have specific teacher education which would enable you to teach gifted children?

2) What is your current teaching assignment?

3) In what capacity have you taught gifted children?

Regular classroom_____ Pull-Out_____ Full Time Segregated

(Please indicate all that apply)

4) How long have you held your current position?

a) If you have taught gifted children in other capacities please indicate your experience?_____

Demographic Information (Parents)

Code Number_____ Date_____

1) Age of your gifted child?_____ Grade_____

2) What is your current level of education?

3) When did you first learn that your child was gifted?

4) What type of program is your child currently enrolled in?

5) How was your child identified as gifted?

Appendix C

January 12, 1996

Parent Association
School Address
Alberta

Dear Madame Chairperson,

I am a University of Alberta doctoral student and I am interested in studying how parents and teachers work together for the benefit of children who have been identified as gifted. The study has two components. I will be interviewing both teacher and parent volunteers. To ensure the confidentiality of participants I will not interview parents and teachers from the same school.

I would be grateful if you could find time during your next parent meeting to notify parents of the attached study. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 492-3746.

Thank-you

Sharon Penney

January 12, 1996
Parent Association
Name of School

To: The Parent Association

Dear Parents,

I am a University of Alberta doctoral student who is interested in studying how parent and teacher work together for the benefit of children who have been identified as gifted within the school system. I am looking for parent volunteers who would be willing to talk about their experiences.

**What would be required?**

The volunteer would be asked to participate in 2 audio-taped interviews. The interviews will be transcribed and given back to the volunteer prior to the second interview. The second interview will provide the volunteer with the opportunity to expand, delete or change the original transcript. All information shared will remain confidential. This study had been approved by the Department of Educational Psychology Ethics Committee.

If you are interested in participating in this study please call Sharon Penney at the University of Alberta, Education Clinic, 492-3746 or 492-2694

Thank you,

Sharon Penney

## Appendix D

| Significant Statement | Label | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| So that happened to him, of course he was a quiet little boy and he's straight out of grade one and he's given the grade five math textbook and an exercise book and that was it... he was working straight to the grade five math which meant that the French was grade five as well. His teacher had said that he should look through the book and decide what problems he needed to do. | Child made to work independently from text.<br><br>Child does have the necessary French Skills to be successful at task. | Meeting the needs of children.<br><br>Lack of support for services to children identified as gifted. |
| One teacher in particular, his grade four teacher, did it extremely well. She had these independent kind of projects you give, book report and stuff, she would let him take his imagination with him...She tended to give him a lot of independent stuff which suits Alex. It challenges him so he churns in pieces of work that are very different from some of the other kids. | Child made to work independently.<br><br>Child had the necessary skills to be successful at task. | Regular classroom.<br><br>Programming tied to the individual teacher. |
| He brought his math book home, I wrote which questions he needed to do and he did it. But then again the math, there was nothing more than just doing it for the teacher. He learnt nothing that year from the math book. teacher. | Parent took over program for the teacher.<br><br>Lack of programming resulted in the child not learning. | Regular classroom. |